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The Cross of Christ: Islamic Perspectives

W. Richard Oakes, Jr.

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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As Muslims and Christians have encountered each other over the centuries, the nature of the person of Jesus along with His mission and death have regularly been the subject of intense discussion. This is because these global religions teach different Christologies and because Jesus is an important figure to the adherents of both faiths. It is the death of Jesus that is the subject of this thesis. The question that this thesis seeks to answer is: Does the Qur'an deny the crucifixion of Jesus? Part I provides a background on the Jesus of Islam. Part II documents the majority opinion about the crucifixion that is exemplified through the *tafsir* of al-Ṭabarī. Part III analyses about twenty minority opinions expressed by medieval Muslim scholars.

Declaration of own work

I declare that this thesis entitled *The Cross of Christ: Islamic Perspectives* is my own work. This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Name: W. Richard Oakes, Jr.

Signed W. Richard Oakes Jr.

Date: 20 July 2013



Tenth-Century Crucifix from Nīshāpūr

Illustration 200 of Charles K. Wilkinson, *Nīshāpūr: Pottery of the early Islamic period* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974), 362.

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Dedication

To my lovely and encouraging wife, Bonnie,

who is a follower of the Most-High Crucified and Risen Son of God

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I owe a debt of gratitude to the many Christ-like examples among my professors at Talbot School of Theology and in particular to Walter Russell and Michael Wilkins who equipped me with sound hermeneutical and exegetical skills.

My appreciation is expressed to my Muslim friends and dialogue partners, Samy Ayoub and Sa'ad Zāfir al-Shehrī, for their help in translating portions of the Arabic and for acquainting me with their world. I am thankful for the helpful responses to my enquiries that I received from Alain George, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Wilferd Madelung, Suleiman A. Mourad, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Keith Small, Mark N. Swanson and A.H. Matthias Zahniser.

It is quite an honour to have been afforded the benefit of the intellectual heritage of the Islamic and Middle East Studies Department of the University of Edinburgh where Islamic Studies has been taught since before my country was founded and where William Muir, Richard Bell, R.B. Sergeant, and W. Montgomery Watt set such high standards that they are still cited by scholars. Special thank are expressed to Professor Hugh Goddard, Martin Whittingham, David Sim Bentley, Richard Shumack and my wife for having read draft(s) and having offered valuable comments ranging from correcting typographical errors to suggesting articles and books worth reading to enhancing the clarity and flow of my argument. My

warmest gratitude is extended to Professor Ian Richard Netton for taking on the role of being my external examiner and for offering his kind suggestions for improving my thesis.

My deepest and sincerest appreciation is expressed to Emerita Professor Carole Hillenbrand for several years of encouragement, guidance, constructive criticism, and editing and translation assistance, each of which has proven invaluable. While my study commenced as an interest in the Qur'an's purported denial of the crucifixion, it was her thoughtful guidance that led to the current robust form of this thesis. It also warrants saying that it was a pleasure working with her and getting to know her as a scholar, mentor and friend. It is an honour to be the fifty-ninth and final postgraduate student whose thesis she has supervised. Several titles have been considered for this thesis, but ultimately my respect for the late John Stott's *The Cross of Christ* and for Carole Hillenbrand's *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* led to the present title.

Full responsibility for the entirety of this thesis, my translations and especially any errors, rests exclusively with me. I am reminded of the lyrics of Billy Joel's 1985 single entitled *You're Only Human* in which he sings:

You're not the only one who's made mistakes
But they're the only thing that you can truly call your own.¹

The mistakes contained herein provide evidence that this is my own original work.

¹http://www.elyrics.net/read/b/billy-joeel-lyrics/you_re-only-human-lyrics.html

Conventions

The style of transliteration used in this thesis is consistent with that used by the Library of Congress, *JQS* and *IJMES*, all of which differ from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* style only by not including macrons under the double letters *th*, *kh*, *dh*, *sh* and *gh* and by representing the *qāf* as a *q* rather than a *ḳ* and the *jīm* as a *j* rather than a *ḏj*. However, footnotes for *El*² articles retain the *El*² transliteration style.

Because Islam and Christianity differ about Jesus' nature, a difference that is so closely related to His crucifixion, the term 'God' could be confusing in this thesis. Therefore, the term 'God' is used to identify the Triune Deity of the New Testament while the term 'Allah' is used to identify the *tawḥīd* (unity of Allāh) Deity of the Qur'an. God is not capitalised where it refers to deities not recognised by Islam or Christianity.

Some confusion can arise because of the proliferation of scholars from Rayy, so this thesis uses Abū Ḥātim for Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933-4), Rhazes for Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī (ca.250/854-313/925) and al-Rāzī for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210).

Unless otherwise stated, quotations of the Qur'an are from a translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 2010). They are

indented and enclosed in «». Except for quotations from Q. 4.157-8, the verse numbers appear within (). My translation of Q. 3.55 is used throughout:

«Allah said, 'Jesus, I will cause you to die and raise you up to Me'»

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from the Holy Bible are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Crossway Bibles: Wheaton, IL, 2001).

Abbreviations

<i>Anth.</i>	<i>An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries</i> , vol. 1, ed. Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi, with Farhana Mayer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i> of the University of London.
<i>EI¹</i>	<i>First Encyclopaedia of Islam 1913-1936</i> , ed. M. Th. Houtsma, A. J. Wensinck, T. W. Arnold, W. Heffernig and E. Lévi-Provençal (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987 Reprint).
<i>EI²</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition</i> , ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Brill Online, 2012).
<i>EIr</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , ed. Ehsan Yarshater (N.Y.: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2008-)
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān</i> , ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill Online, 2012).
<i>Fihrist</i>	Abu'l-Faraj Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq al-Nadīm (d. 388/998), <i>The Fihrist</i> , ed. and tr. Bayard Dodge (Chicago: KAZI Publications, 1998 reprint).
<i>HW</i>	Hans Wehr, <i>A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic</i> , ed. J Milton Cowan, various editions and publishers.
Ibn Kh., deS.,	Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282), <i>Wafayāt al-a'yān wa anbā' abnā' al-zamān</i> , tr. Baron William MacGuckin de Slane, 4 vols. (London: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1961).
<i>IJMES</i>	<i>International Journal of Middle East Studies</i>
<i>IJT</i>	<i>The Indian Journal of Theology</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JQS</i>	<i>Journal of Qur'anic Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>

Lane	Edward William Lane, <i>An Arabic-English Lexicon</i> , various editions and publishers.
Lawson	Todd Lawson, <i>The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought</i> (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).
MIC	<i>Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia</i> , ed. Joseph W. Meri (London: Routledge, 2006).
MW	<i>The Muslim World Journal</i>
RSO	<i>Rivista Degli Studi Orientali</i>

Chapter 1-Introduction

1.1 *The purported Qur'anic denial of the crucifixion of Jesus*

Jesus is an important figure to both Christians and Muslims. Because Christianity and Islam hold different doctrines about the nature of the person of Jesus, His mission and His death, there have been many intense conversations between Christians and Muslims over the centuries. Among these three aspects of Jesus, it is the death of Jesus that is the principal focus of this thesis. The middle half of the Apostles' Creed proclaims the orthodox Christian dogma about Jesus:

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Swanson argues that '[t]he centrality of the cross of Christ to the Christian faith goes without saying'² and then he shows how that orthodoxy has been challenged by Muslims from the beginning of Islam. The Arabic *Life of Shenoute*, which he dates to the 60s/690s, says that the 'children of Ishmael' 'deny my

² Mark N. Swanson, "Folly to the Ḥunafā': The Cross of Christ" in *Arabic Christian-Muslim Controversy in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries A.D.* (Excerpt from unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Arabicorum et Islamologiae, 1995), 10.

sufferings, which I accepted upon the cross'.³ Since this dating approximates the earliest Qur'an, it is reasonable to hold that most Muslims have denied the crucifixion of Jesus from the earliest times. The centrality of the disagreement about the crucifixion is noted by Schimmel who says that 'The main difference between Qur'anic and Biblical Christology is found in the negation by the Qur'an of Jesus' crucifixion.'⁴ Cragg puts it this way, 'The Qur'ān, and with it the whole corporate mind of Islam' says that 'God was *not* in Christ reconciling the world to himself; He was with Jesus withdrawing him to heaven'.⁵

Abdel Haleem translates Q. 4.157-8, in which the purported denial of the crucifixion of Jesus appears, as:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him—No! God raised him up to Himself. God is almighty and wise.»

³ Mark N. Swanson, "Folly to the Ḥunafā': The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy" in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. E. Grypeou, M. Swanson, D. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 239, 255; Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It* (Princeton: Darwin, 1997), 279, 282, confusingly dates the work to both 16/638 and to the fifth century. Ariel G. López, *Shenoute of Atriye and the uses of Poverty* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2013), 133 says that Shenoute was born in 246 and died in 365.

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, "Jesus and Mary as Poetical Images in Rūmī's Verse" in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Zaidan Haddad (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995), 149.

⁵ Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: an exploration* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1985), 168.

Hilālī and Khan translate it as:

«And because their saying (in boast), “We killed Messiah ‘Īsā (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allāh,”--but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them [the resemblance of ‘Īsā (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man)], and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely, they killed him not [i.e. ‘Īsā (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary): But Allāh raised him [‘Īsā (Jesus)] up (with his body and soul) unto Himself (and he is in the heavens). And Allāh is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise.»⁶

Central to the denial of the crucifixion is the notoriously ambiguous phrase,

shubbiha lahum شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ, which, because it appears only once in the Qur’an in Q.

4.157, is a *hapax legomenon*. Abdel Haleem translates it as:

«though it was made to appear like that to them»,

while Hilālī and Khan translate it as:

«The resemblance of ‘Īsā (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man.)»

The words enclosed in brackets and/or parentheses do not appear in the Arabic;

they show that the popular Hilālī and Khan translation is not a literal translation,

but that it reflects the view that is commonly held among Muslims. Ironically, the

root letters of the ambiguous phrase *shubbiha lahum*, appear in the word

mutashābihāt in *Sūrat al-‘Imrān* (Q. 3.7) warning that since only Allah knows the

⁶ Taqī al-Dīn Hilālī and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Qur’an: English translation of the meanings and commentary* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2002).

meaning of the ambiguous verses, it is irreverent for men to interpret such verses.

Sayyid Quṭb explains the difficulty:

As for how his “death” [*wafāt*] came about, and how his being raised came about, these are mysterious matters [*umūr ghaybiyya*] which fall into the category of obscure verses [*mutashābihāt*] whose exegesis no one knows but God. There is no use in trying to get to the bottom of them, either in doctrine or in law. Those who chase after them and make them into a matter for dispute will only end up falling into a state of doubt and confusion and complexity, without coming to any certainty in truth and without being able to rest their minds in a matter which must be entrusted to the knowledge of God.⁷

Denying that Jesus was crucified remains important to many Muslims today

because, in their view, Jesus must remain alive in order to return on Judgment

Day.⁸ So important is the denial of the crucifixion to Muslims that ‘it is hardly

⁷Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1973), re: Q. 3.55.

⁸ See below comments by Göran Larsson on page 30 as well as Chapters 3.2, 3.3, 6.5 and 7 for further elucidation of this point. A recent example of the problem of the crucifixion being treated with the utmost seriousness comes from a Saudi *fatwā* (legal opinion) of 1991 declaring that anyone who affirms the crucifixion is an unbeliever. This *fatwā* was translated by Khaleel Mohammed in his “The Case of the Overlooked Fatwa”, *JES* 46:3 (Summer 2011), 379-80 where he cites Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Dawīsh, *Fatāwā al-Lajnat al-Dā’ima l’il Buḥuth al-‘Ilmiyya wa’l Iftā* (Riyadh: General Presidium for Research Responsa, Propagation, and Guidance, 1411/[1991]), 3:213-215. The pertinent part of this *fatwā* reads: It has been established by proof from the Scripture and the authentic traditions that Jesus, son of Mary, was not killed and did not die, but that God raised him alive unto Himself and that he will return at the end of time as a just judge in the Muslim community. Whoever says that Jesus son of Mary died, and that he will not return toward the end of time, has opined contrary to the book of God and the authoritative tradition of His prophet, thereby committing a grievous error. After such a person comes of age, and proof has been sustained against him for lying against God and his Messenger, he is

surprising that Muslims are suspicious of Christians who write scholarly studies of Jesus in the Qur'ān.⁹ This thesis is such a scholarly study of Jesus in medieval Muslim religious literature and especially in the Qur'an. In particular, it studies that sensitive doctrine of the purported denial of the crucifixion of Jesus.

1.2 Literature review

The received wisdom among Muslims is that Allah cast the likeness of Jesus upon someone else who then looked so like Jesus that the Jews crucified this person instead of Jesus. This substitutionist motif is so widespread that most Western scholars report that this is the only understanding held among Muslims. A wide spectrum of scholars agree with the statement of Kuitse that '[t]his interpretation...is now accepted by all scholars'.¹⁰

to be ruled a disbeliever. [Khaleel Mohammed's italics] Khaleel Mohammed explains that 'A ruling of disbelief would, in the strictly traditional jurisprudential system of Saudi Arabia, be essentially a death sentence.' At least in terms of its earthly consequences, this *fatwā* makes the denial of the crucifixion more important to Muslims than its affirmation is to Christians.

⁹ Neal Robinson, "Christian and Muslim Perspectives on Jesus in the Qur'an" *Fundamentalism and Tolerance: An Agenda for Theology and Society*, ed. Andrew Linzey & Peter Wexler (London: Bellew, 1991), 105.

¹⁰Roelf S. Kuitse, "Christology in the Qur'an," *Missiology* XX: 3 (July 1992), 360; Abdul Majīd, *Qur'ān* (Lahore and Karachi: The Taj Company Limited, 1957), 182n. 42 says that Irenaeus identifies Basilides as naming Simon of Cyrene as a substitute; Wilson Anand, "The Christ of the Quran," *IJT*, vol. 7 (1958): 56-60, esp. 56; Mark Durie, *Revelation* (Upper Mt Gravatt, Australia: CityHarvest Publications, 2006), 19; E. E. Elder, "The Crucifixion in the Koran", *MW*, 1923, 242; Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books,

Most modern scholarship concerning what the Qur'an says about the crucifixion relies on medieval Muslim scholarship. However, a few modern scholars have expressed their own interpretation. Noting that the phrase «God is almighty and wise» appears in two verses that mention Jesus' death, Q. 4.158 and 5.118, Earl Elder concludes his 1923 article by expressing his hope that the emerging 'back to the Koran' movement will see echoes of God's wisdom and power in a saying of the Apostle Paul:

1999), 148, 369; Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Baker Books, 2002), 287, 291; John Gilchrist, *Facing the Muslim Challenge* (Cape Town: Life Challenge Africa, 2002), 108; Sebald Hofbeck, "Christological Doctrines in Islam," *Laeta Dies* 50 (1968), 185; Lawson, 2; Neal Robinson, "Sectarian and Ideological Bias in Muslim Translations of the Qur'an" *Islam & Christian Relations* vol. 8 (1997): 265; J. J. Saunders, "The Muslim Christ," *Milla wa-Milla*, vol. 8 (1968): 7 names Pilate as the person crucified and he says that the Gospel of Barnabas names Judas while Basilides names Simon of Cyrene; Imad N. Shehadeh, "Reasons for Islam's Rejection of Biblical Christology", *BibSac* 161 (July-September 2004): 285; "Additional Reasons for Islam's Rejection of Biblical Christology", *BibSac* 161 (October-December 2004): 410; Mona Siddiqui, "The Image of Christ in Islam: Scripture and Sentiment" *Images of Christ: Ancient and Modern* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press: 1997), 166; Robert Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2002), 41; Karl-Wolfgang Tröger, "Jesus, the Koran, and Nag Hammadi," *Theology Digest* 38 (Fall 1991), 213; Christian W. Troll, "Jesus and Christianity in Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Islamochristiana*, vol. 24 (1998): 92; R.C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 210; A. H. Mathias Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), xiv.

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-4)¹¹

An important opinion was given by Mahmoud Shaltūt when he was Vice-Principal of the Faculty of Religious Principles at al-Azhar University in 1942, where he later became the shaykh from 1958-1963. His *fatwā* is summarised as meaning:

All that the verses afford in this matter is that God promised Jesus that He would complete for him his life-span, that he would cause him to die a natural death, and honour him by exalting him and providing him immunity from those who disbelieved. This promise was fulfilled in that Jesus' enemies did not kill nor crucify him; rather, God caused him to die at the end of his term and exalted him.¹²

The interpretation of Shaltūt does not deny the crucifixion, but rather it only denies that the Jews were victorious over Jesus. Shaltūt says that Allah raised Jesus after His death in contradistinction to the traditional Muslim belief that He was rescued before His crucifixion. This is because Shaltūt interprets the Qur'an by the Qur'an, rather than by *ḥadīth*. His interpretation reflects the ideas that Allah caused Jesus to die in accordance with Q. 3.145, 5.17, 8.17 and 22.66 and then Allah raised Jesus to Himself in accordance with the word order of Q. 3.55, 4.157-8 and 19.33.

¹¹Elder, "Crucifixion", 258.

¹² Mohammed, "Overlooked Fatwa", 384 translating Mahmoud Shaltut, *Al-Fatawā: Dirasah li-Mushkilat al-Muslim al-Mu'asir fī Hayatihi al-Yawmiyah w'al-Āmmah [sic]* (Beirut: Dār al-Shuruq, 1986), 59-65.

Robert Zaehner argues that if Jesus is the subject of *shubbiha lahum*, then that phrase literally means Jesus ‘was made in their likeness’ meaning that He was made into a man just like them. He then argues that verse 158 can be translated as Allah ‘raised Him up on the cross’. His reasoning results in his innovative translation:

(The Jews said): “Lo, we slew the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God; yet they did not slay him, nor did they crucify him, but he was made like unto them (a man), and (it was) God (who) raised him up (upon the Cross and) to Himself.”¹³

After considering the work of over 30 Muslim commentators, Mahmoud Ayoub boldly challenges the Muslim consensus by saying that the ‘myth and legend’ proffered by ‘overconfident’ and ‘polemical’ ‘Muslim commentators’ who ‘obscured the essence of the Qur’anic view of Christ behind the veil of their own conjecture’ did not ‘answer convincingly the charge of history.’ Demonstrating that he is more interested in locating a spiritual meaning than he is in determining truth, he then argues that ‘the mere facts of history’ are only ‘superficial’ when the ‘facts, not meaning, become the point of contention’. After having rejected Muslim *mufasssirūn*, Christians and historians, Ayoub says that the real lesson to be learned from this passage is that ‘prideful’ ‘ignorant’ ‘faltering’ ‘self-deluded’ ‘foolish’ ‘wrongdoers’ cannot overcome Allah’s eternal word, Jesus. He concludes by

¹³Zaehner, *Sundry Times*, 211-3.

quoting a touching line from the novel *City of Wrong* in which Jesus' fate on the cross is left in suspense.¹⁴

Neal Robinson's *Christ in Islam and Christianity* opens with five chapters on the Qur'anic portrayal of Jesus followed by a consideration of possible Christian sources. He deals with Jesus' Virgin Birth, miracles, Second Coming, and denial of His crucifixion. He focuses on the difficult terms *shubbiha lahum* and *tawaffā* that concern the crucifixion. Since he relies so heavily on al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), al-Bayḍāwī (685/1286), and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) while belittling opposing viewpoints, his book might better be entitled 'The Qur'anic Jesus as seen through the eyes of Muslim *mufasssīrūn*'.¹⁵

Although he has not completed his PhD nor published on the subject, Joseph Cumming's posting of a 40-page proposal for his dissertation on the Yale website has received wide attention. His intention is to examine what the *tafāsīr* of al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), al-Bayḍāwī, and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966) say about Q. 3.55, 4.157, 5.117 and 19.33. He will treat every report cited in these *tafāsīr* as 'legitimate', so 'that there is much more room to find common ground with Christians than is generally supposed by either Muslims or Christians

¹⁴Mahmoud M. Ayoub, "Toward an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion" *MW LXX* (April 1980), 91, 93, 104-6, 116-8.

¹⁵ Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

today'. While this facilitates his work at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture and their popular *Loving God and Neighbor Together* response to *A Common Word between Us and You*, the approach is fundamentally flawed. Not only does he accept the notion that *ḥadīth* are the only legitimate method for interpreting the Qur'an, but he also does not distinguish between *ḥadīth*, reports (*akhbār*), narrative (*riwaya*), reports transmitted by Jews and Christians (*Isrā'iliyyāt*), tales (*qīṣaṣ*) and 'spurious fables' (*asāṭīr*). Furthermore, he rejects the reasoning of the *mufasssīrūn* and then he promotes the very reports that those medieval Muslim scholars have rejected, dismissed or used as the foil of an argument.¹⁶

The Crucifixion and the Qur'ān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought, published in March 2009, is the culmination of over thirty years of research by Todd Lawson that started with his 1980 McGill University M.A. thesis, then continued with his two 1991 articles in the *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies*. Lawson describes his work as groundbreaking by saying that 'This book is the first extended study of the problem in which such an understanding of the verse by Muslims is taken seriously.' While there seems to be a consensus that

¹⁶<http://www.yale.edu/faith/downloads/rp/Did%20Jesus%20Die%20on%20the%20Cross-English.pdf>; Joseph Cumming, *Did Jesus Die on the Cross? The History of Reflection on the End of His Earthly Life in Sunnī Tafsīr Literature* (Yale University, May 2001), 5; The term 'legitimate' appears on pages 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 23, 25, 35 and 37; he mentions *asāṭīr* on page 30.

Muslims have always and only interpreted Q. 4.157 by using substitution legends, half of the Muslim scholars whose work Lawson surveys take other approaches.¹⁷

Several reviews of Lawson's book are available. The Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies in Oxford posted a review that contrasts Lawson's book with Reynold's later article.¹⁸ Tahir Ijaz argues that Muslim commentators have produced 'a belief that is far removed from a correct understanding of the original religious text' and then he proceeds to elaborate by saying:

One of the unfortunate ironies is that the conjecture and uncertainty mentioned in the verse that befell the Jews of Jesus' day also befell the Muslims who themselves started to conjecture and differ as to the exact circumstances of what transpired regarding Jesus.¹⁹

Göran Larsson's review states that 'Lawson argues convincingly' that 'it is not possible to find a unified Muslim interpretation' because 'it was also difficult to accept the idea that Jesus would return in the last day if he had actually died on the

¹⁷ Lawson, 6; Benjamin T. Lawson, *The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Commentary: A Historical Survey* (Montreal: Unpublished McGill University M.A. thesis, 1980); Todd Lawson, "The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Commentary: A Historical Survey" in *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 10:2 (Apr-Ju 1991); Todd Lawson, "The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Commentary: A Historical Survey, Part II" in *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 10:3 (Ju-Se 1991).

¹⁸<http://www.cmcsoxford.org.uk/index.php?pageid=99>

¹⁹Tahir Ijaz, Review of *The Crucifixion and the Quran* in *Ahmadiyya Gazette Canada*, September-October 2009, 13, 16, downloaded from http://www.ahmadiyya_gazette.ca/magazine/38/9-10/AGC_Eng_sep_oct_2009.pdf?ml=5&mlt=system&tmpl=component

cross'.²⁰ The *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* carried a review by a member of its editorial staff, Mustafa Shah, who unleashes unrelenting criticism upon Lawson with a long and profusely footnoted piece that includes several factual and logical errors of its own.²¹ Very much to the contrary, Andani composed a composite Ismā'īlī view of the crucifixion based on Lawson's book to show that medieval Ismā'īlī scholarship was in 'perfect harmony' with the Gospels.²² The *Muslim World* journal published my review that focuses on those Muslim scholars whom Lawson identifies as not holding substitutionist views. Those scholars are the focus of Part III of this thesis.²³

Gabriel Said Reynolds argues that Q. 4.157 must be read in the context of anti-Jewish polemics including the statement in Q. 4.155 that the Jews killed their prophets. He points out that *tawaffā* always means that God makes someone die, and in fact, that God is the only one who can take any human life. Furthermore, Jesus rose to heaven after His death, not before it. He explains that Q. 4.156-9 defends Jesus against the Jewish claims that He was a sorcerer, just as it defends

²⁰ Göran Larsson, review of *The Crucifixion and the Quran* in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 21.1, January 2010, 98.

²¹ Mustafa Shah, review of *The Crucifixion and the Quran* in *JQS* 12.1 (2010), 191-203.

²² Khalil Andani, "'They Killed Him Not' The Crucifixion in Shi'a Isma'ili Islam", 2011, downloaded from: <http://ismailimail.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/they-killed-him-not-the-crucifixion-in-shia-ismaili-islam/>

²³ W. Richard Oakes, Jr., review of "The Crucifixion and the Qur'an" *MW* 101:1 (January 2011): 119-21.

Mary against Jewish accusations of fornication. Reynolds explains that there was confusion about how many disciples were with Jesus, not about who was crucified. He also argues that Q. 4.159 shows that Jesus will provide testimony against His murderers.²⁴

Suleiman Mourad gives two reasons that early Muslims could not accept the crucifixion. Since Jesus must return to defeat the Antichrist and no man can die twice, Jesus could not have been crucified. Muslims could not consider the possibility that Allah did not protect Jesus from the Jews because that would admit the possibility that Allah might not protect them. He argues that once Muslim *mutakallimūn* started using Q. 4.157 as an anti-Christian polemic, they could not consider the possibility that Allah might have allowed Jewish transgression in order for Him to triumph over their sin by raising Jesus from the dead. His translation makes his interpretation clear:

For their saying: “It is we who killed the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God.” Nay, they did not kill him by crucifying him. They thought they did, and those who affirm that are uncertain; they have no knowledge about it except by speculation. In certainty they did not kill him because God raised him from death up to Him.²⁵

²⁴ Gabriel Said Reynolds, “The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive” *BSOAS* 72:2 (2009), 237-42, 253-8.

²⁵ Suleiman A. Mourad, “Does the Qur’ān deny or assert Jesus’s crucifixion and death”, *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān* (London: Routledge, 2011), 350, 352, 355.

Mourad's idea is that the resurrection maintains the honour that Allah would have lost if the crucifixion had been the final word.

Mourad's rationale has difficulties. It does not support his supposition that Allah will intervene against the enemies of Muslims in time to prevent their deaths. He provides no evidence that Muslims believe that Allah protects all Muslims from their enemies. He does not identify the party responsible for the death of Jesus.

The literature surveyed above makes it apparent that there is a diversity of opinion among contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim scholars concerning what medieval Muslim scholars taught about the crucifixion of Jesus. These contemporary scholars also use a wide range of methods to interpret Q. 4.157 and arrive at interpretations that vary considerably. Both of these facts show that there is no consensus (*ijmā'*) about whether the Qur'an denies the crucifixion of Jesus. This diversity of interpretations is especially apparent in the work of Lawson.

1.3 The aims and original contribution of this thesis

Part I synthesises in a comprehensive way some of the most important early Muslim literature concerning Jesus into thematic units in which almost every detail that the sources mention about Jesus is noted. An even fuller analysis of this diverse array of information would be a dissertation in itself. Although the material

in Part II is widely known, it is necessary to provide a point of reference to compare properly the minority viewpoints expressed next. Part III analyses the work of all the medieval Muslim scholars thought to consider the crucifixion of Jesus from non-substitutionist perspectives. Part III is an original contribution to knowledge because it establishes the importance of each of these scholars, it attempts to analyse carefully their pertinent material and it arrives at an entirely different understanding of the data than is currently in print.

There are three cases in which this thesis uses different editions from those used by Lawson. He uses the 1999 edition of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, but the 1957 edition is translated here; he uses the 1935-8 edition of the *Mafāṭih al-ghayb/Kitāb al-tafsīr al-kabīr* of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, but the 1889-90 edition is translated here; he uses the 1897 edition of *Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* of Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī, but the 2008 edition is translated here. There are several Arabic sources that Lawson mentions, but does not translate. In five cases, Lawson mentions secondary literature that cites the primary Arabic work. This thesis translates and analyses the following primary Arabic works noting in brackets the secondary author that Lawson cites:

Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī, *'Alā l-Naṣārā* [Wilferd Madelung]

Pseudo al-Ghazālī, *al-Radd al-jamīl* [Louis Massignon]

Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa'l-qirānāt* and *Sarā'ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā'* [David Hollenberg]

Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-yanābī'* [Shin Nomoto, Henry Corbin, Paul Walker]

Lawson mentions two primary Arabic sources in footnotes without detailing their contents in his text, which this thesis translates and analyses:

Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān*

Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520

While Lawson names the following three scholars as affirming the crucifixion in one of their works, this thesis includes translations and analysis of pertinent portions of primary Arabic works by these same scholars that Lawson does not mention. Those works include:

Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-usūl*

Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Ta'wīl sūrat al-nisā'* and *Kitāb al-'ālim wa'l-ghulām*

Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb* (translated by others)

This thesis translates and analyses one work not mentioned by Lawson:

The anonymous *Bālāgh* (Book of Highest Initiation)

1.4 Organisation of this thesis

Part I consists of six chapters that describe what early Muslims knew about Jesus in order to contextualize what they knew about His crucifixion. Part I summarises stories about Jesus that are found within the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, *sīra*, *ta'rīkh*, *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature of the early centuries of Islam and that continue to be held in the highest regard by Muslims.

Part II presents the received wisdom of Muslim scholarship concerning the crucifixion of Jesus from the *Tafsīr* (Commentary) and *Ta'rīkh* (History) of al-Ṭabarī along with a few works from the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (the tales of the prophets) genre. Although much of this is widely known, it must be discussed and understood before investigating minority viewpoints.

Part III evaluates the work of a spectrum of medieval Muslim scholars who interpret the crucifixion of Jesus through non-substitutionist motifs. These scholars follow eight distinct lines of reasoning about the crucifixion of Jesus, each of which is covered in its own chapter. These chapters are organised in the chronological order in which the lines of reasoning developed. The scholars within each chapter are likewise arranged chronologically.

Except for the most famous of these scholars, a brief biography is provided in order to establish that each of these scholars is important. Each scholar's

relevant comments are then translated and analysed. These two elements provide the evidence for the line of reasoning. The line of reasoning followed in Part III begins in the prologue of Part III. It then flows thorough the prologue of each chapter, the observations on each scholar, the discussion at the end of each chapter and finally the Concluding reflections of Chapter 18.

1.5 Limitations

Lawson's identification of a selection of medieval Muslim scholars who viewed the crucifixion of Jesus through non-substitutionist lenses does not make clear whether these were important scholars and whether all of the pertinent material had been translated. Therefore, an investigation of the backgrounds of these scholars and more extensive translations and explanations of the relevant portion of their writing has been necessary. The discovery of errors and omissions prompted the identification of the vulnerabilities inherent in this present research. Even the easiest portions of these Arabic texts are difficult to translate, but almost every text had dotting errors, lacunae, irregular grammatical constructions or incomplete references that required improvising; these are not critical editions. The entirety of the works of these scholars has not been translated, so it is most reasonable to expect that some of them have said more about the crucifixion elsewhere. Other medieval Muslim scholars probably expressed a non-

substitutionist understanding of the crucifixion that have not come to the attention of this researcher. These, along with shortcomings of which this writer is unaware, make it certain that this is not the final word on the subject.

Part I- A summary and analysis of how Jesus is treated in early Arabic primary sources

The purpose of Part I is to convey an understanding of what early Muslims ‘knew’ about Jesus and ‘knew’ here does not mean ‘to know’ with epistemic certainty. Rather, it means ‘believe’, regardless of whether early Muslims had sufficient warrant for their ‘belief’ to be ‘a justified belief’, much less than for their ‘belief’ to constitute ‘knowledge’. Therefore, the medieval Muslim scholarship that has been admitted into the corpus of Muslim literature and has maintained its standing therein is accepted at face value in this thesis. Even though some Western scholars consider some of the reports discussed in Part I to be inaccurate, critiquing them is at cross-purposes with the reason for including these works in the first place. The reason to survey what early primary Arabic Muslim sources have to say about Jesus is to contextualize how Muslims understand Jesus. However, it is sometimes valuable to point out where they offer a view that differs from what Christians understand.

Part I summarises the portions of fifteen primary Arabic sources that discuss Jesus. These works are some of the most important early Islamic sources that discuss Him. Most of these were written during the ninth to twelfth centuries during the same period in which the scholars in Part III wrote. The pertinent

details concerning Jesus are assembled in a logical order with each piece of data receiving a footnote so that its precise origin is easily ascertainable. Every effort has been made to document every appearance of each discrete detail in the first work of the first genre in which it appears and then to avoid repeating it later.

Several modern academic works summarise how Muslims understand Jesus.

Duncan Black MacDonald wrote the 1934 entry on ‘*Īsā* (Jesus) for *EI*¹. He takes inventory of Qur’anic titles and descriptions of Jesus, then its contradictory statements concerning His death before stating how a *ḥadīth* (a report of a saying of Muhammad) depict Him on Judgment Day.²⁶ G.C. Anawati wrote the 1978 entry on ‘*Īsā* for *EI*², which is approximately five times as long as the *EI*¹ article. It covers the etymology of the word ‘*Īsā*, the various names of Jesus in the Qur’an, the annunciation, conception and birth of Jesus, the mission of Jesus, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the servant of God, Jesus and Muhammad, Jesus and the Word of God, Jesus and the Spirit of God, the Trinity, the problem of the crucifixion, the return of Jesus, the Last Judgment, Jesus in tradition and in Ṣūfism, and in Islamo-Christian polemic.²⁷ In his *EQ* article of 2003, Neal Robinson surveys the Qur’anic Jesus material, the *name* ‘*Īsā*, the son of Mary and the Messiah, Jesus’ conception and infancy, the description of Him as ‘word’ and ‘spirit’, His status and mission

²⁶ D. B. MacDonald, “‘*Īsā*”, vol. 3, *EI*¹, 524-6.

²⁷ G. C. Anawati, “‘*Īsā*”, *EI*².

and then the plot to kill Him along with His ascension and future return.²⁸ These three articles focus on the Qur’anic material concerning Jesus and are explained sparingly with further material from the *ḥadīth*.

In a recent article, Amjad Hussain quotes the Qur’an, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukharī, *Ṣūfī* sayings, the *History* of al-Ṭabarī, the *Qiṣaṣ* of al-Tha’labī, the *Tafsīr* of al-Rāzī, the *Ninety-Nine Names* of al-Ghazālī, the *Mathnawī* of Rūmī, the *Qasida* of al-Busīrī, the *Bezels of Wisdom* of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr. Even though Amjad Hussain focuses on the Qur’anic denial of Jesus’ divinity and crucifixion, he argues that Islam and Christianity hold compatible views of Jesus. The first page of his article states that ‘Muslims hold the central figure of Christianity in high esteem’, that ‘Jesus is no more than’ a prophet and that He is miraculously rescued from crucifixion. He concludes with a discussion about a letter entitled *A Common Word between Us and You* that was signed by 138 prominent Muslims and then sent to Pope Benedict XVI along with other Christian leaders on 13 October 2007.²⁹

²⁸ Neal Robinson, “Jesus”, *EQ*.

²⁹ Amjad Hussain, “Muslim Perceptions of Jesus” in Gregory A. Barker and Stephen E. Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83-149.

Several other scholars also portray an Islamic Jesus. Khalidi presents 300 Ṣūfī sayings about Jesus that were transmitted by over thirty transmitters.³⁰ Ayoub paints a picture of a Jesus who is a pious, ascetic, forgiving, loving and enlightened entirely-human Ṣūfī saint who warns people to submit to Allah.³¹ In a recent book, Robinson summarises how al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī and Ibn Kathīr explain the most difficult Qur’anic terms concerning Jesus.³² Leirvik is interested in the dialogue that takes place between Muslims and Christians concerning the portrayal of Jesus in the Qur’an, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *qīṣaṣ*, Shī’ism, Ṣūfism and polemics.³³ Morton contrasts the Biblical Jesus with the Qur’anic Jesus by situating the two of them in a hypothetical conversation on the Emmaus Road.³⁴ Zwemer presents a classic Christian polemic against the Muslim Jesus,³⁵ while both ‘Ata ur-Rahim³⁶ and Mughal³⁷ return the favour.

³⁰Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: sayings and stories in Islamic literature* (London: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³¹Mahmoud M. Ayoub, ‘Toward an Islamic Christology: An Image of Jesus in Early Shī’ī Muslim Literature’, *MW*, LXVI (1976), 163-88.

³²Robinson, *Christ*.

³³Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (London: Continuum, 2010) update of (Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1999).

³⁴Jeff Morton, *Two Messiahs: the Jesus of Christianity and the Jesus of Islam* (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 2011).

³⁵Samuel Marinus Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: an essay on the life, character, and teachings of Jesus Christ according to the Koran and orthodox tradition* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912).

Part I of this present work uses categories similar to those in *EQ* and *El*²

while it uses a breadth of early sources that is wider than any of the other ten works. The discussion presented in this thesis differs from these works because it synthesises almost every detail from fifteen early sources. While Hussain directly quotes very selective portions, and the encyclopaedias focus on just the Qur'an, the other ten works mentioned above select their sources from a wider range of genres.

The evidence in the Qur'an is considered in chapter 2, the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq in chapter 4, the *Ta'rikh* of al-Ṭabarī in chapter 5, and the *Asbāb al-nuzūl* of al-Wāḥidī in chapter 7. Five *ḥadīth* compilations, three canonical along with the early *Muwaṭṭa'* of Malik b. Anas and the later *Mishkāṭ*, are treated together in chapter 3. The five *Qiṣaṣ* analysed in chapter 6 provide the most comprehensive stories concerning the life of Jesus. They were written between the eleventh century and the fifteenth century in the wide area ranging from Damascus to Transoxania. They were composed variously in Arabic, Persian or Turkish.

³⁶Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus: A Prophet of Islam* (London: MWH London Publishers, 1977).

³⁷Aslam Mughal, *Jesus in Islam* (London: Pen Press, 2003).

Chapter 2-A summary of how Jesus is treated in the Qur'an

Jesus' importance to Islam is seen in the appearance of His name 27 times in 11 *sūras*. However, He is not mentioned as frequently as Moses, Pharaoh, Satan, Abraham, Noah or Joseph.³⁸ This summary first discusses the family history of Jesus. Next, the *Sūra* 3.33-64 and *Sūra* 19.16-40 nativity narratives are discussed along with parallels within them and variations between them. The mission for which Allah sent Jesus to the Jews and how the Jews responded is covered next. Lastly, this chapter considers the terms used by the Qur'an to identify Jesus (see table on page 52).

2.1 Family history

The Qur'anic nativity narratives of Jesus begin with His family history. Allah decreed that the line of prophets would descend through the house of 'Imrān³⁹ and that the wife of 'Imrān would dedicate her expected son to Him.⁴⁰ Allah accepted her dedication even though He knew that she was carrying the girl⁴¹ Mary, the

³⁸ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (Cairo: Dār wa-Maṭābi' al-Sha'b, 1381/1968) has 25 entries for Jesus (643), 136 entries for Moses (831-3), 73 for Pharaoh (664-5), 69 for Satan (506-7), 48 for Abraham (1-3), 43 for Noah (874) and 28 for Joseph (922-3).

³⁹Q. 3.33-4.

⁴⁰Q. 3.35. Ḥannā is not named as Mary's mother in the Qur'an.

⁴¹Q. 3.35-6.

sister of the prophets⁴² Aaron⁴³ and Moses.⁴⁴ This confusion about Mary's relation to Aaron/'Imrān persists in the later genres discussed in Part I. Mary's mother entrusted Mary and her offspring into Allah's care, so that they would receive protection from Satan's touch.⁴⁵ In turn, Allah entrusted Mary into the care of the prophet⁴⁶ Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist.⁴⁷ Allah's provision for Mary's material needs⁴⁸ encouraged the old, weakened, frail and greying⁴⁹ Zachariah to beseech Allah to provide him with a son.⁵⁰ His son John the Baptist became a noble, chaste, righteous prophet,⁵¹ who was wise, tender, pure, devout and kind.⁵² This family history documents the purely human genealogy of Jesus and the special care that Allah provides for the righteous people in Allah's line of prophets.

⁴²Q. 4.163; 6.84-6.

⁴³Q. 19.28.

⁴⁴Q. 7.150; 23.45.

⁴⁵Q. 3.36.

⁴⁶Q. 6.85; 21.89.

⁴⁷Q. 3.37.

⁴⁸Q. 3.37-8.

⁴⁹Q. 19.3.

⁵⁰Q. 3.38-9; 19.2-4; 21.89.

⁵¹Q. 3.39.

⁵²Q. 19.12-4.

2.2 Nativity narrative

A messenger announced to Mary that Allah had chosen her above all other women to become the mother of the Messiah⁵³ because Allah had kept her pure;⁵⁴ He caused her to guard her chastity.⁵⁵ The Virgin Mary conceived Jesus,⁵⁶ left her people⁵⁷ and then gave birth to Jesus while she was enduring great pain under a palm tree⁵⁸ on a peaceful hillside next to a stream.⁵⁹ A voice originating from under the ground informed Mary that Allah had provided fresh palm dates and a stream of water to sustain her.⁶⁰ When Mary returned home, the Jews accused her of fornication⁶¹ and the baby Jesus miraculously spoke.⁶² The nativity narratives document the Annunciation and the Virgin Birth.

2.2.1 Parallels within nativity narratives

There are five places in the Qur'anic nativity narratives where the stories of John the Baptist parallel the stories of Jesus. The angels announce that Zachariah⁶³

⁵³Q. 3.45; 19.19.

⁵⁴Q. 3.42.

⁵⁵Q. 21.91; 66.12.

⁵⁶Q. 19.22.

⁵⁷Q. 19.22.

⁵⁸Q. 19.23.

⁵⁹Q. 23.50.

⁶⁰Q. 19.24-6.

⁶¹Q. 19.27-8.

⁶²Q. 19.30-4.

⁶³Q. 3.39; 19.7; 21.90.

and Mary⁶⁴ would both have sons. Both Zachariah⁶⁵ and the Virgin Mary express doubts about their ability to receive such divine favour.⁶⁶ Zachariah receives a sign concerning John the Baptist while Mary is a sign⁶⁷ and Jesus is a sign or a clear sign. Allah silences Zachariah for three days⁶⁸ and Mary for one day.⁶⁹ John is «a Word from God»⁷⁰ while Jesus is «a Word from Him». John is not domineering or rebellious⁷¹ and Jesus is not domineering or graceless.⁷² Allah blesses John saying:

«Peace on him the day he was born, on the day of his death, and on the day he is raised to life again (Q. 19.15)»,

while only a few verses later, Jesus says about Himself:

«Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again. (Q. 19.33)»

These parallels also demonstrate that Jesus is like John; He is a man in the line of prophets of which Muhammad is the seal (*khātam al-nabiyyīn* (Q. 33.40)). By emphasizing the human nature of Jesus, the Qur'an subtly denies His divine nature.

⁶⁴Q. 3.45.

⁶⁵Q. 3.40-1.

⁶⁶Q. 3.47; 19.20-1.

⁶⁷Q. 21.91; 23.50.

⁶⁸Q. 10.10.

⁶⁹Q. 19.26.

⁷⁰Q. 3.39.

⁷¹Q. 19.14.

⁷²Q. 19.32.

2.2.2 Variations between nativity narratives

There are five variations between these two nativity narratives. Zachariah prays for a son⁷³ either in the presence of Mary in the Temple⁷⁴ or in secret.⁷⁵ The announcement of John's conception to Zachariah is made either by a group of angels⁷⁶ or by Allah.⁷⁷ The Annunciation to Mary is made either by the Spirit of Allah appearing as a man⁷⁸ or by a group of angels.⁷⁹ Mary receives the Annunciation either in the Temple⁸⁰ or at a secluded eastern place.⁸¹ Mary conceives Jesus either by Allah proclaiming the word 'Be'⁸² or by His breathing into her through His Spirit.⁸³ These variations prepare us for variations about Jesus found within other Muslim literature.

⁷³Q. 3.38-9; 19.2-4, 7; 21.89-90.

⁷⁴Q. 3.37.

⁷⁵Q. 19.3.

⁷⁶Q. 3.39.

⁷⁷Q. 19.7.

⁷⁸Q. 19.17.

⁷⁹Q. 3.45.

⁸⁰Q. 3.42.

⁸¹Q. 19.16.

⁸²Q. 3.47, 59.

⁸³Q. 21.91; 66.12.

2.3 The mission and miracles of Jesus

Allah endowed Jesus with the character qualities of purity, honour⁸⁴ and righteousness⁸⁵ in preparation for His mission to the Jews in which He confirms the Mosaic Law and eases some of its requirements.⁸⁶ Allah taught Jesus Scripture,⁸⁷ the Torah, the Gospel and Wisdom.⁸⁸ Allah strengthened Jesus with the Holy Spirit,⁸⁹ made Him blessed⁹⁰ and close to Himself.⁹¹ The seven miracles that Allah performed through Jesus were speaking while He was a baby,⁹² fashioning clay into living birds, healing the blind, healing the leper, raising the dead, seeing through walls⁹³ and calling down a table from heaven.⁹⁴ Jesus' fashioning of clay into living birds is reminiscent of Allah's fashioning clay into a living human.⁹⁵ Jesus called the Jews to

⁸⁴Q. 3.45.

⁸⁵Q. 3.46.

⁸⁶Q. 3.50; 5.46.

⁸⁷Q. 19.30; 3.48.

⁸⁸Q. 3.48; Majid Fakhry, *An Interpretation of the Qur'an* (N.Y.: New York University Press, 2000, 2004) properly capitalizes 'Wisdom' because it refers to the Psalms (*Zabūr*) and might even refer to Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

⁸⁹Q. 2.87, 253.

⁹⁰Q. 19.31.

⁹¹Q. 3.45.

⁹²Q. 3.46; 5.110.

⁹³Q. 3.49; 5.110.

⁹⁴Q. 5.112-5.

⁹⁵Q. 38.71.

obey His commands and He reminded them to worship Allah,⁹⁶ serve Him⁹⁷ and to help His cause.⁹⁸ The Jesus of the Qur'an delivered the same message as had the previous prophets--that Allah alone is God.

The Jews responded to Jesus in three different ways. Allah made the disciples of Jesus compassionate and merciful⁹⁹ and they acknowledged that they were Allah's devoted helpers¹⁰⁰ who worshipped Him and believed in Him, His revelation and His messenger.¹⁰¹ Allah appealed to Muslims to help Him just like the disciples of Jesus had done.¹⁰² The disciples of Jesus asked for a table to be lowered from paradise in order for them to develop the confidence to spread Jesus' call to other nations.¹⁰³ The second response to Jesus' call was that some Christians invented monastic asceticism in order to earn Allah's favour:

«We sent Jesus, son of Mary: We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented—We did not ordain it for them—only to seek God's pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly. (Q. 57.27)»

⁹⁶Q. 3.50; 43.63.

⁹⁷Q. 3.50; 5.117; 19.36.

⁹⁸ Q. 3.52; 61.14.

⁹⁹Q. 57.27.

¹⁰⁰ Q. 3.52; 61.14.

¹⁰¹Q. 3.52-3.

¹⁰² Q. 61.14.

¹⁰³ Q. 5.109-18.

The third way in which the Jews responded is consistent with the numerous

Qur'anic stories of rejected prophets; indeed, most of the Jews rejected Jesus.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Q. 5.78.

Terms used by the Qur'an to identify Jesus

<u>Sūra</u>	<u>Jesus</u>	<u>Jesus, son of Mary</u>	<u>Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary</u>	<u>The Messiah (or 'Christ'), son of Mary</u>	<u>Son of Mary</u>	<u>The Messiah</u>	<u>Pronoun</u>	<u>Prophet (nabī)</u>	<u>Messenger (rasūl)</u>	<u>Spirit (rūh)</u>	<u>Word (kalima)</u>	<u>Sign (ayā/bayyina)</u>	<u>Servant ('Abd Allāh)</u>
2	136L	87, 253						136	87 (twice), 253	87, 253		87, 253	
3	52, 55, 59, 84L		45					33, 34, 84	49, 53		45	49, 50	
4	163L		157, 171			172	159	163	157, 163, 171 (twice)	171	171		172
5		46, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116	75	17 (twice), 72		72		84-90	109, 111			114	
6	85L												
9				31		30							
19		34					22	30, 31				21	30
21							91			91		91	
23					50							50	
33		7L											
42	13L												
43	63				57							63	59
57		27							27				
61		6, 14							6 (twice)			6	
66							12			12			

2.4 Qur'anic explanation of terms associated with Jesus

In order to ensure that today's Christians do not attribute foreign meaning to Qur'anic terms that are the same as or similar to Biblical terms, it is necessary to explain how several terms are used throughout the Qur'an in order to understand what they mean when these terms are applied to Jesus. Allah identifies Jesus as His prophet (*nabī*), His messenger (*rasūl*) to the Jews, the son of Mary (*Ibn Maryam*), the Messiah (*al-masīḥ*), a spirit from Him (*rūḥ minhu*), a word from Him (*kalima-minhu*), a sign (*āya*) or a clear sign (*bayyina*) and His servant (*'Abd Allāh*). The locations of these terms appear on the previous page and are examined hereafter. The 'L' that appears half a dozen times in that table designates that this is among the lists of Qur'anic messengers.

2.4.1 Jesus is a prophet and a messenger

The centrality of prophecy to the identity of Jesus is evidenced by the fact that the son of Mary proclaims that He is a prophet (*nabī*) even before *Sūra* 19 mentions that His name is Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative commences by stating that the line of prophets proceeds through the house of 'Imrān before it mentions Jesus.¹⁰⁶ Jesus appears in half a dozen lists that place Him alongside seventeen Jewish prophets: Noah, Job, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac,

¹⁰⁵Q. 19.30, 31.

¹⁰⁶Q. 3.33-4.

Jacob, Joseph, Jonah, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, John the Baptist

and his father Zachariah. Allah guides the prophets¹⁰⁷ and makes no distinction

between them.¹⁰⁸ While Allah once states that He sent prophets to prevent

sectarian division,¹⁰⁹ these lists mostly 'correct' Jewish and Christian beliefs by

saying that Allah has transmitted the same message through all of the prophets,

that humankind must worship Allah alone and that the followers of other religions

are doomed to Hell.¹¹⁰

While the term prophet (*nabī*) is often mentioned in the Qur'an, the term messenger (*rasūl*) appears much more frequently.¹¹¹ Jesus is one of a select group of

only ten messengers: Muhammad,¹¹² Ishmael,¹¹³ Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Lot,

Shu'ayb and Moses¹¹⁴ whom Allah sent to warn humans against unbelief and

remind them of his laws. Allah inspired the messengers¹¹⁵ so that the religious

teachings these messengers brought are unified, despite the different laws and

¹⁰⁷Q. 6.85.

¹⁰⁸Q. 2.136.

¹⁰⁹Q. 42.13.

¹¹⁰Q. 2.135-6; 3.84-5; 4.163-9; 6.84-8.

¹¹¹ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam* has 98 references to prophet(s) (847) and 366 references to messenger(s) (418-24).

¹¹²Q. 2.143; 5.19; 7.158; 34.28; 48.29.

¹¹³Q. 19.54.

¹¹⁴ These seven messengers appear in at least four of the following messenger lists: Q. 7.59-103; 11.25-96; 26.10-177; 29.14-39; 37:75-139; 54.9-33.

¹¹⁵ Q. 3.163-5.

practices that respect their cultural preferences.¹¹⁶ Allah required each prophet to pledge that he would provide an account of how his message had been received,¹¹⁷ but none of the messengers reported,¹¹⁸ except Jesus.¹¹⁹

The five most elite messengers are the ‘messengers of firm resolve’ (*ūlu-l-‘azm min al-rusul* (Q. 46.35)): Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.¹²⁰ Jesus makes clear the primacy of Muhammad by foretelling his coming as Allah’s final messenger, whom Christians fail to follow:

«Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.’ Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, ‘This is obviously sorcery.’(Q. 61.6)»

Noah, Abraham and Moses are mentioned more frequently in the Qur’an than is Jesus. Abraham followed primordial monotheism, which later Muslims follow, and along with his son, Ishmael from whom Muhammad physically and spiritually descended, founded the Ka’ba (cubic shrine in Mecca). Allah makes a distinction between messengers by talking with some and raising others:

¹¹⁶ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān* (England: The Book Foundations, 1980, 2008 printing), 838n. 14 discussing Q. 42.13.

¹¹⁷ Q. 33.7.

¹¹⁸ Q. 5.109.

¹¹⁹ Q. 5.117.

¹²⁰ Q. 46.35.

«We favoured some of these messengers above others. God spoke with some; others He raised in rank. We gave Jesus, son of Mary Our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. (Q. 2.253)»

Fakhry notes that Allah spoke with Moses and Muhammad while He raised Muhammad to a high rank.¹²¹ However, Allah also addresses Jesus four times in *Sūra* 5, āyas 110-1, 115, 116-8 and 119 and the Qur'an uses the same word for raised in rank (*rafa'*) about Jesus in Q. 4.158 and the same root in Q. 3.55 as it does in Q. 2.253. It is not clear where Jesus ranks within the *ūlu-l-'azm min al-rusul*, but even all of these messengers are portrayed as strictly human.

2.4.2 Jesus is the 'son of Mary'

Since Jesus is named the 'son of Mary' twenty-three times and since there are only three places other than prophet lists in which He is mentioned without the phrase 'son of Mary', the importance of associating Jesus with Mary is self-evident. In this respect, the Qur'anic representation of Jesus bears more resemblance to the apocryphal *Syriac Gospel of the Infancy* that uses 'son of Mary' fifteen times than it does to the New Testament in which 'son of Mary' appears only in Mark 6:3.¹²² While 'son of Mary' occurs only three times in the Meccan

¹²¹ Fakhry, *Qur'an*, 46n. 190-1 re: Q. 2.253.

¹²² Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 27-8.

sūras,¹²³ it occurs twenty times in the Medinan *sūras* including eight times in *Sūra* 5, the last *sūra* to have come down.

Mary is the only woman mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an and it states that she is the most honoured woman.¹²⁴ Some of that honour is conferred upon Jesus through the term 'son of Mary', especially since virtually all Arabic names mention an individual's father, which would have been difficult in the case of Jesus. Yet, the title 'son of Mary' can be seen as an affront to Christians.¹²⁵

2.4.3 Jesus is the Messiah

Used in the Qur'an only in reference to Jesus, *al-masīḥ* means 'the anointed one' and is translated as the Messiah or the Christ. Only found in Medinan *sūras*, this term appears once in the announcement of Jesus' full name to Mary¹²⁶ and once when the Jews claim credit for crucifying Him.¹²⁷ *Al-masīḥ* appears nine other times

¹²³ Q. 19.34; 23.50; 43.57.

¹²⁴ Q. 3.45; 19.19.

¹²⁵ Since the writers of the Gospels record 82 times that Jesus referred to Himself as the 'Son of Man' to whom the *Ancient of Days* (an Aramaic name for God) had given eternal dominion over all humankind (Daniel 7:13-4) and since the New Testament refers to Jesus as 'Son of God' 41 times, the 'honorific' title 'son of Mary' can be understood as a polemical argument against the divinity of Jesus just as easily as it can be understood as an 'honorific' title. This should be no surprise to Muslims who object when Christians do not affirm that Muhammad is a prophet, but instead honour him as a gifted leader and statesman.

¹²⁶ Q. 3.45.

¹²⁷ Q. 4.157.

in arguments that Jesus is not Allah,¹²⁸ demonstrating that the term *al-masīḥ* is used mostly in a polemical manner.

2.4.4 Jesus is a spirit

The word spirit (*rūḥ*) is associated with Jesus in three ways: Allah breathed His own Spirit into Mary in order for her to conceive Jesus;¹²⁹ Jesus has been strengthened with the Holy Spirit;¹³⁰ Jesus is a spirit from Allah:¹³¹

«People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’– stop [this], that is better for you– God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust. (Q. 4.171)»

But, Jesus is not the only Qur’anic person Who is associated with the Holy Spirit.

Those who believe in Allah and the Last Day are strengthened by a spirit from

Allah¹³² and the Spirit was breathed into all humanity through Adam.¹³³ Jesus’

association with the Holy Spirit does not set Him apart from the rest of humanity.

2.4.5 Jesus is the word

Jesus is twice called a word (*kalima*) from God, once in the Q. 4.171 denial of His divinity above and once in the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative that calls Jesus a «word

¹²⁸Q. 4.171, 172; 5.17 (twice), 72 (twice), 75; 9.30, 31.

¹²⁹Q. 21.91; 66.12.

¹³⁰Q. 2.87, 253.

¹³¹Q. 4.171.

¹³²Q. 58.22.

¹³³Q. 15.28-9; 32.6-9; 38.71-2.

from Him»¹³⁴ six verses after it calls John «a word from God».¹³⁵ Both instances declare His humanity at the expense of His divinity; the Qur'an does not equate 'word' to the *Logos* in the prologue to John's Gospel.

2.4.6 Jesus is a sign

Jesus is a sign (*āya*)¹³⁶ and a clear sign (*bayyina*).¹³⁷ *Āya* usually means verse, but can also mean sign or word while *bayyina* means clear proof. Even though Jesus is a sign, so are the created order,¹³⁸ plagues,¹³⁹ the story of Joseph,¹⁴⁰ the remnants of destroyed civilizations¹⁴¹ like Sodom,¹⁴² Allah creating man from dust,¹⁴³ His provision of wives,¹⁴⁴ the diversity of languages and races,¹⁴⁵ His provision of food¹⁴⁶ on the table He lowered from paradise,¹⁴⁷ Mary¹⁴⁸ and Jesus.¹⁴⁹ Most of these signs are inanimate; plagues, Sodom and destroyed civilizations are evil. While Jesus is

¹³⁴ Q. 3.45.

¹³⁵ Q. 3.39.

¹³⁶ Q. 3.49, 50; 5.114; 19.21; 21.91; 23.50.

¹³⁷ Q. 2.87, 253; 43.63; 61.6.

¹³⁸ Q. 2.164; 30.22-5, 46; 31.32; 42.33.

¹³⁹ Q. 7.133.

¹⁴⁰ Q. 12.7.

¹⁴¹ Q. 20.128.

¹⁴² Q. 29.35.

¹⁴³ Q. 30.20.

¹⁴⁴ Q. 30.21.

¹⁴⁵ Q. 30.22.

¹⁴⁶ Q. 34.14.

¹⁴⁷ Q. 5.114.

¹⁴⁸ Q. 21.91; 23.50.

¹⁴⁹ Q. 2.87, 253; 3.49, 50; 5.114; 19.21; 21.91; 23.50; 43.63; 61.6.

one of only three people who are named as a sign and He is the most frequently named sign, signs are not significant in and of themselves. Rather, signs are markers that are meant to direct one's attention to Allah and His power.

2.4.7 Jesus is a servant of Allah

Of all the Qur'anic terms that refer to Jesus, the servant of Allah most clearly designates His human nature while denying His divinity. Its appearance in Q. 43.59 is a response to the Meccan discussion about whether Jesus or angels were the most superior creature. That same comparison is seen in Q. 4.172 where the divinity and sonship of Jesus along with the Trinity are denied:

«The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God, nor would the angels who are close to Him. (Q. 4.172)»

In Q. 19.30, «I am the servant of God» are the first words that proceed from the mouth of the baby Jesus.

2.5 Observations on Jesus as depicted in the Qur'an and in the Canonical Gospels

The Qur'an contains much less information about Jesus than do the Gospels. The two longest contiguous passages concerning Jesus in the Qur'an are *Sūra* 3.33-64 and *Sūra* 19.16-40. They constitute about half of all the Qur'anic material concerning Jesus. *Sūra* 5 includes two narratives, both twelve verses long, that together are about half the length of the combined nativity narratives. Three other passages contain about eight verses each, Q. 5.84-90, 9.28-35 and 43.57-64. The

remaining references to Jesus are isolated verses. Altogether, the Qur'anic material is about as long as Matthew and Luke's infancy accounts.

While the Gospels concentrate on the teaching, miracles and passion of Jesus, the Qur'an barely mentions these. It once mentions that Jesus taught the Jews to follow and serve Allah alone. While *Sūra* 5.109-120 describes the miracle of the table, His six other Qur'anic miracles are mentioned in two *āyas*. Q. 4.157 alone purportedly denies His crucifixion. The Q. 3.49 and 5.110 miracle of raising of the dead must have been provocative in light of the seeming denial that anyone other than Allah possesses that ability:

«Have they chosen any gods from the earth who can give life to the dead? (Q. 21.21)»

The first thing that Jesus says in the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative is:

«I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with God's permission, it will become a real bird (Q. 3.49)»

This miracle is mentioned again in Q. 5.110. Since the Arabic term *ṭayr* is plural, it is best translated as 'birds'. The words used in the Q. 3.47-9 miracle of making clay into living birds closely parallel the words used in Q. 6.2 and 32.9 when God makes Adam: both of them make (*khalaqa*) from clay (*min-ṭīnin*) and both of them breathe

(*nafakha*) and command it to be (*kūn*).¹⁵⁰ While not mentioned in the Canonical Gospels, making birds from clay is mentioned as a miracle in the Apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*.¹⁵¹ Even though the Qur'an is clear that *khalaqa* means 'make', later commentators supposed that *khalaqa* could mean 'determining', 'arranging' or 'fashioning' in order to distance Jesus from divinity.¹⁵² Even though this terminology closely parallels the creative action of Allah, Jesus creates by Allah's permission, so He is represented as being entirely human.

The Qur'an holds a higher Christology than the Talmudic view that Jesus is a bastard and a sorcerer.¹⁵³ By proclaiming the Annunciation, Virgin Birth and Jesus' miracles, the Qur'an has a higher Christology than do liberal Christians and secularists. The Qur'an conveys honour upon Jesus by repeatedly placing Him in the line of prophets, making Him one of the five most important messengers and naming Him after the most honourable woman.

¹⁵⁰ Neal Robinson, "Creating Birds from Clay: A Miracle of Jesus in the Qur'an and in Classical Muslim Exegesis", *MW*, LXXIX: 1 (January 1989): 2, 5; on page 12, Robinson states that of the 173 times *khalaqa* appears in the Qur'an, Allah is the subject 173 times 162 times and it is used to mock pagan deities 8 times; Kuitse, "Christology", 358.

¹⁵¹ Robinson, "Perspectives", 97.

¹⁵² Robinson, "Birds", 7-9.

¹⁵³ Q. 5.110, 61.6; Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 12, 64.

Nonetheless, the Qur'anic Jesus is not the Biblical 'Son of Man' or 'Son of God' Who humbled Himself by being born as a human, living an exemplary sinless life, offering Himself as a substitute for the sins of mankind, then arising in triumph over sin, Satan and death. The Qur'anic Jesus is a human among the line of prophets who repeats the message of the oneness of Allah. The Qur'an shows parallels between John the Baptist and Jesus to show that Jesus is not divine, but rather that He is another human prophet. When the Qur'an equivocates about five events in the life of Jesus, it comes as no surprise that later transmitters report a range of stories, rather than a single account, in order to deny His crucifixion.

The Qur'an focuses mostly on the birth of the human Jesus and how He is a suitable predecessor for Muhammad. Stories of a palm tree next to a stream and of speaking in infancy are found in *Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, respectively.¹⁵⁴ Mourad compellingly argues that the Greek palm tree myth about Leto giving birth to Apollo was transmitted through the Christians in Najrān, who had previously worshipped a palm tree, then into the Qur'an in Q. 19.23-6 and then into the eighth-century *Pseudo-Matthew* where it is found in 20.1-2.¹⁵⁵ The Q. 3.45 reference to Jesus as being «one of those brought near to God» associates Jesus

¹⁵⁴ Neal Robinson, "Jesus", *ET*.

¹⁵⁵ Suleiman A. Mourad, "From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm tree Story concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur'ān", *Oriens Christianus* 86 (2002): 206-16.

with the angels.¹⁵⁶ Since the angels bow to Adam¹⁵⁷ and since Jesus is like Adam because Allah breathed His Spirit into Adam¹⁵⁸ and Jesus,¹⁵⁹ it may be that the angels also bow to Jesus in order to show that Jesus is ‘much superior to the angels.’¹⁶⁰

Furthermore, the Qur’an uses several terms that appear to be devoid of meaning and significance, especially compared with how these terms are used in the New Testament. Tottoli goes so far as to say that many of the verses have ‘quite a pronounced polemical meaning’.¹⁶¹ The term ‘Messiah’ ‘does not have a special meaning in the Qur’an’¹⁶² or ‘[t]he original meaning of the title *masih* has been lost’,¹⁶³ in fact, it is almost always used in passages that deny His divinity. The Spirit is closely associated with the creation of Adam and Jesus, the initiation of the prophethood of Jesus and Muhammad, and with Judgment Day.¹⁶⁴ Nonetheless, ‘Spirit (*rūḥ*) and Spirit of holiness (*rūḥ al-qudus*) are emptied of all the weighty

¹⁵⁶D.B. MacDonald, “*Īsā*”, *El*¹; G.C. Anawati, “*Īsā*”, *El*².

¹⁵⁷ Q. 7.11.

¹⁵⁸ Q. 38.72.

¹⁵⁹ Q. 21.91; 66.12.

¹⁶⁰ Hebrews 1:4.

¹⁶¹ Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 39.

¹⁶² Kuitse, “Christology”, 361.

¹⁶³ Hofbeck, “Christological”, 183.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an* (Ashland, Or: White Cloud Press, 2002), 26.

meanings which they bring to the minds of Christians'.¹⁶⁵ The term 'sign' has so little to do with Jesus that it does not even distinguish Him from inanimate objects or evil. The term 'servant of Allah' most clearly separates Jesus from His divinity and in fact, Q. 19.31 even obliges Jesus to pay alms (*zakāt*).

The term 'son of Mary' is almost always used in passages that deny His divinity. 'The use of the term 'Ibn Mariam' may be emphasizing Jesus' mortality',¹⁶⁶ which is the equivalent of denying His divinity. Ayoub argues that the 'tone of the entire passage [that uses the term 'son of God' in Q. 9.30] is highly polemical' and that the Qur'an polemically 'called Jesus Son of Mary to affirm that he is her child, and not the son of God.'¹⁶⁷ Robinson argues that 'the expression "the son of Mary" took on polemical overtones; it was an implicit reminder that Jesus is not the son of God'.¹⁶⁸

Much ink has been spilt on what it means to be 'the word' in the Qur'an. Ibn Kathīr argues that the reason that Jesus is called the word is that Allah spoke Him

¹⁶⁵ Abdelmajid Charfi, "Christianity in the Qur'an Commentary of Ṭabarī," *Islamochristiana*, tr. Penelope C. Johnstone (6) 1980, 129.

¹⁶⁶ Siddiqui, "Image of Christ", 163.

¹⁶⁷ Mahmud Mustafa Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God: A Study of the Terms *Ibn* and *Walad* in the Qur'an and *Tafsīr* Tradition" in ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Zaidan Haddad, *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995), 70, 77.

¹⁶⁸ Robinson, "Jesus", *El*².

into existence through His command 'Be!'¹⁶⁹ This is not good reasoning. Both Jesus and John the Baptist are called the word, but John was not spoken into existence through Allah's decree 'Be!' Adam and Jesus were spoken into existence when Allah uttered the word 'Be!', but Adam is not called 'the word'.¹⁷⁰ It should be noted that 'the texts do not state that Jesus *is made through* a word...[i]t is simply stated that he *is* a word from God [emphasis in original].'¹⁷¹ Since an Arabic speaker would not naturally use the feminine word *kalmia* along with the masculine Jesus, the term may have originated with foreign Christians then lost its original meaning in transit.¹⁷² 'Kalimat is used, nearly exclusively, for a word coming from God,'¹⁷³ the implication being that the word 'existed before entering the womb of Mary.'¹⁷⁴ Word and messenger are interchangeable terms that the Qur'an uses to designate Allah's instrument of revelation,¹⁷⁵ so 'word' does not imply divinity. Q. 4.171, which uses 'word' to refer to Jesus, 'is more overtly polemical'.¹⁷⁶ So, it can be seen

¹⁶⁹ Robinson, "Perspectives", 100.

¹⁷⁰ Anand, "Christ", 58.

¹⁷¹ Roest Crollius Ary, "Christ, A Word from God," in the Qur'ān", *Studia Missionalia*, 30 (1971), 159.

¹⁷² Ary, "Christ", 157.

¹⁷³ Ary, "Christ", 147.

¹⁷⁴ Anand, "Christ", 58.

¹⁷⁵ Ary, "Christ", 153, 162.

¹⁷⁶ Neal Robinson, "Jesus", *ET*.

that 'Word' is 'emptied of all the weighty meanings which they bring to the minds of Christians'.¹⁷⁷

In summary, most of what the Qur'an has to say about Jesus is either in one of the nativity narratives or it is among the many passages that deny His divinity in a myriad of ways. The very fact of His birth shows that He is different from the eternal Allah while the miracles attributed to Him are done through the permission of Allah. The Jesus of the Qur'an is a righteous prophet in the line of righteous prophets who declare the unicity of Allah and prepares the way for Muhammad.

¹⁷⁷Charfi, "Ṭabarī", 129.

Chapter 3-A summary of how Jesus is treated in *ḥadīth* compilations

Ḥadīths are reports of Muhammad's model behaviour (*sunna*) and sayings that were orally transmitted through his Companions and Successors. The first known compilation of *ḥadīths* is attributed to Malik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and it remains an important source for jurisprudential purposes.¹⁷⁸ Six compilations are generally regarded as canonical by most Sunni Muslims, and in order of importance, they were assembled by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim b. al-Hajjāj (d. 261/875), Abū Dā'ūd (d. 275/889), his student al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), al-Nasā'ī (d. 302/915), and Ibn Māja al-Qazwīnī (d. 272/886).¹⁷⁹ The canonical *ḥadīths* are so important that al-Ghazālī wrote that 'It is permissible for the *sunna* to abrogate the Qur'an ... [because] the Word of God is one.'¹⁸⁰

This thesis considers the work of Malik b. Anas, the three most important canonical compilers, and the *Mishkāt*. Since Malik b. Anas, al-Bukhārī and Muslim are well-known, no background is provided on them. The *Muwaṭṭa'* of Malik b. Anas contains only four *ḥadīths* that mention Jesus. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* compilation of al-Bukhārī

¹⁷⁸ G.H.A. Juynboll, "Hadith and the Qur'an", *EQ*.

¹⁷⁹ Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis: Selected Texts with Classical and Modern Muslim Interpretations*, tr. and ed. Alford T. Welch (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 33-34; Juynboll, "Hadith".

¹⁸⁰ Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writings and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 190.

names Jesus in 47 *ḥadīths* in fifteen books in each of the nine volumes and there are 44 *ḥadīths* in seventeen chapters in eight books in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* compilation of Muslim that mention Jesus.

Abū Dāʿūd (d. 275/889) travelled widely collecting half a million *ḥadīths*, of which 4,800 mostly legal *ḥadīths* made it into his *Kitāb al-Sunan* while he was living in Baṣra. Maybe because his compilation includes *ḥadīths* that were narrated by transmitters who were not cited in either of the *Ṣaḥīḥs*, Abū Dāʿūd was the first to distinguish between *ḥadīths* that are sound, close to sound, weak, and ‘those about which I have said nothing good (*ṣāliḥ*)’.¹⁸¹ Abū Dāʿūd mentions Jesus in only two *ḥadīths*, but he does so without mentioning in which category he places them.

Containing 5,945 *ḥadīths*, the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* of Imām Walī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī (d. 737/1337)¹⁸² is one of the most important *ḥadīth* compilations.¹⁸³ The *Mishkāt* includes 32 *ḥadīths* concerning Jesus. Although the *Mishkāt* is a much later compilation (almost five centuries), the new material that it contains about Jesus is mentioned after the four early compilations.

¹⁸¹J. Robson, “Abū Dāʿūd al-Sidjīstānī, Sulaymān b. al-Ashʿath”, *EF*².

¹⁸²Muḥammad b. Abd Allāh Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, tr. James Robson, v. 1 (Lahore: Sh.Muhammad Ashraf, 1973), xiv.

¹⁸³<http://www.sunniforum.com/forum/showthread.php?5587-Number-of-Hadith-in-Mishkat-ul-Masabih>

A total of 129 *ḥadīths* add to what Muslims ‘know’ about Jesus. They show Jesus as a good Muslim on Judgment Day and provide a physical description so that He can be recognized at His Second Coming.

3.1 The Night Journey

Muhammad’s Night Journey to Jerusalem (*isrāʿ*) and ascension to heaven (*miʿrāj*) is mentioned six times by al-Bukhārī and three times by Muslim. This seminal experience begins at the Kaʿba¹⁸⁴ or on the roof of Muhammad’s house in Mecca.¹⁸⁵ The full length of Muhammad’s torso is cut open by Gabriel¹⁸⁶ and his heart is removed,¹⁸⁷ in order to wash it¹⁸⁸ with Zamzam water¹⁸⁹ and to fill him with wisdom and belief.¹⁹⁰ One of the *ḥadīths* in Muslim’s compilation reads:

Anas b. Malik reported on the authority of Malik b. Sa sa’ (sic Ṣaʿṣaʿa), perhaps a person of his tribe, that the Prophet of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: I was near the House (i. e. Kaʿbah) in a state between sleep and wakefulness when I heard someone say: He is the third among the two persons. Then he came to me and took me with him. Then a golden basin

¹⁸⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, tr. Abd-al-Hamid Siddiqui, book 1. chapter 75. number 314, downloaded from <http://www.biharanjuman.org/hadith/Sahih-Muslim-english-translation.pdf> on 22 Nov 2011.

¹⁸⁵ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.313; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, tr. M. Muhsin Khan, volume 1. book 8. report 345, downloaded from: http://www.biharanjuman.org/hadith/Sahih_Al-Bukhari.pdf on 22 Nov 2011. Al-Bukhārī 5.58.227 mentions al-Hatim or al-Ḥijr as possible alternative locations.

¹⁸⁶ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.08.345; 4.54.429; 5.58.227; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.314.

¹⁸⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.314.

¹⁸⁸ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.08.345; 4.54.429; 5.58.227.

¹⁸⁹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.54.429; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.313; 1.75.314.

¹⁹⁰ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.08.345; 4.54.429; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.313; 1.75.314.

containing the water of Zamzam was brought to me and my heart was opened up to such and such (part). Qatada said: I asked him who was with me (i.e. the narrator) and what he meant by such and such (part). He replied: (It means that it was opened) up to the lower part of his abdomen (Then the *ḥadīth* continues): My heart was extracted and it was washed with the water of Zamzam and then it was restored in its original position, after which it was filled with faith and wisdom.¹⁹¹

Muhammad then travels to heaven with Gabriel on a mythological animal that is

between the size of a mule and a donkey that has a human face and is named

Burāq.¹⁹² One *ḥadīth* says Jesus is the only one who greeted Muhammad as a

prophet¹⁹³ while another *ḥadīth* states that both Jesus and John recognized the

prophethood of Muhammad.¹⁹⁴

3.2 Judgment Day

Although Muhammad claims that he is the leader of all mankind on

Judgment Day,¹⁹⁵ several of his *ḥadīths* portray Jesus as being that leader.

Muhammad says that Jesus is a superior soul created by Allah.¹⁹⁶ When Muhammad

¹⁹¹Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.314.

¹⁹²Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.54.429; 5.58.227; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.314.

¹⁹³Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.08.345.

¹⁹⁴Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.640. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.314 places John the Baptist on the third level. 1.75.313 places Adam on the lowest level and Abraham on the sixth level while Jesus, Idris and Moses are on undesignated levels and it fails to mention John, Joseph and Aaron.

¹⁹⁵Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.60.236; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.83.378.

¹⁹⁶Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.60.236.9.93.507; 9.93.532v; 9.93.601.

leads the morning prayers in Mecca, he coughs, stops his recitation and bows when he reaches Q. 23.50 which reads:¹⁹⁷

«We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign; We gave them shelter on a peaceful hillside with flowing water. (Q. 23.50)»

While Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses name their sins¹⁹⁸ and while the sins of Muhammad receive forgiveness,¹⁹⁹ Jesus does not admit to any sins.²⁰⁰ It is reported that Muhammad said²⁰¹ in his sermons²⁰² and in prophetic commentary on the Qur'an²⁰³ that on Judgment Day, he will repeat the words that Q. 5.118 places in the mouth of Jesus:²⁰⁴

«I [Jesus] told them only what You commanded me to: “Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since You took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them: You are witness to all things and if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise.’ (Q. 5.117-8)»

Muhammad is recorded as saying that whoever adds to the *shahāda* (Muslim creed) that ‘Jesus is Allah’s Slave and His Apostle and His Word which He bestowed on

¹⁹⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.32.918.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.83.378.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.83.373; 1.83.378.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.83.378.

²⁰¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.568; 4.55.656; 6.60.264; 6.60.149; 6.60.150; 8.76.533; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.85.397.

²⁰² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.656; 6.60.264; 8.76.533.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 6.60.149; 6.60.150.

²⁰⁴ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8.76.533; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.85.397.

Mary and a Spirit created by Him' will be admitted into Paradise.²⁰⁵ Muslim includes a similar *ḥadīth* that says anyone adding to the *shahāda* that the Messiah is Allah's servant, Word and Spirit as well as the son of Allah's handmaiden will 'enter Paradise through any one of its eight doors.'²⁰⁶

When the Muslims finally conquer Constantinople,²⁰⁷ the Antichrist will ravage Syria and Iraq for forty years. The descent of Jesus is the last of the ten signs of Judgment Day.²⁰⁸ Wearing two light yellow garments, Jesus descends²⁰⁹ to the white minaret on the east wall of the Great Umayyad Mosque of Damascus to catch²¹⁰ and kill the Antichrist²¹¹ at the Ludd Gate.²¹² During His forty years back on earth, Jesus conducts *jihād* (holy war) against Jews, Christians and the Antichrist until only Islam exists.²¹³ When Jesus and His disciples wage war against Gog and Magog, they pray to Allah when they approach the Sea of Galilee, then Allah sends

²⁰⁵Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.644.

²⁰⁶Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.11.43.

²⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 41.9.6924.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 41.13.6931; 41.13.6932; 41.13.6933; 41.13.6934, the last two of which cannot be traced to Muhammad. The other signs are smoke, the Antichrist, the beast, the sun rising from the west, Gog and Magog, landslides in east, landslides in the west, landslides in Arabia, and a fire in Yemen.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 1.72.287; 1.72.288; 1.72.289; 1.72.290; 1.72.291; 1.72.292; 1.72.293; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.72.287; 1.72.288; 1.72.289.

²¹⁰*Ibid.*, 41.18.7015.

²¹¹*Ibid.*, 41.9.6924; 41.18.7015; 41.21.7023.

²¹²Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 41.18.7015; M. Sharon, "Ludd", *Et*².

²¹³ Abū Dawūd, *Sunan*, Book 37, Number 4310 downloaded from <http://ebookbrowse.com/sunan-abu-dawud-english-pdf-d48879335> on 22 Nov 2011.

insects and birds to wage war on behalf of Muslims and He sends rain to restore abundance to Muslims.²¹⁴

Muhammad interprets Q. 4.159:

«There is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in [Jesus] before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them (Q. 4.159)»

as meaning that Jesus will descend from Paradise in order to judge mankind justly and to offer prayers to Allah on Judgment Day.²¹⁵ After abolishing Judaism and Christianity,²¹⁶ Jesus will judge²¹⁷ all men according to the Qur'an.²¹⁸ Jesus is a good Muslim imam²¹⁹ who recites the *shahāda*, performs the *ḥajj* (pilgrimage),²²⁰ leads mankind in prayer,²²¹ and guides²²² people in the circumambulation of the Ka'ba.²²³ On Judgment Day, those who have worshipped Jesus, will be told 'You are liars, for Allah has never taken anyone as a wife or a son' and then they will be condemned

²¹⁴Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 41.18.7015.

²¹⁵Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3.34.425; 3.43.656; 4.55.657.

²¹⁶Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3.34.425; 3.43.656; 4.55.657; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.72.287; 1.72.288; 1.72.289.

²¹⁷Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.658; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.72.287; 1.72.288; 1.72.289; 1.72.292.

²¹⁸Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.658; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.72.292.

²¹⁹Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.172.290.

²²⁰*Ibid.*, 7.32.2877.

²²¹*Ibid.*, 1.72.293; 41.9.6924.

²²²*Ibid.*, 1.72.291.

²²³*Ibid.*, 1.76.323; 1.76.324.

to Hell,²²⁴ because there is no greater *shirk* than calling Jesus ‘Lord’.²²⁵ Jesus assigns Muslims to their respective places in Paradise,²²⁶ yet His judgment results in ‘nine hundred and ninety-nine out of one thousand [bound] for the Hell-Fire.’²²⁷ Those who acknowledge that Muhammad is a prophet after having followed Jesus will receive a double reward.²²⁸ Jesus sees a man stealing, but because the thief invokes the name of Allah, Jesus believes the thief’s testimony that he has not stolen anything, rather than relying on what He saw with His own eyes.²²⁹

The much later *Mishkāt* portrays Jesus returning to earth with ‘his hands on the wings of two angels’ and killing every infidel who is within His sight²³⁰ until the earth is filled with the ‘putrefaction and stench’ of their rotting bodies.²³¹ Jesus will wipe the faces of the faithful,²³² lead them in prayer in Syria and then kill the Antichrist and show them His bloody spear.²³³ Jesus will die after seven²³⁴ or forty-

²²⁴Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.60.105; 9.93.532s; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.81.352.

²²⁵Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7.63.209.

²²⁶Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 41.18.7015.

²²⁷*Ibid.*, 41.21.7023.

²²⁸Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.03.097; 4.55.655.

²²⁹Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.653; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 30.37.5840.

²³⁰Al-Tibrizī, *Mishkāt*, III, 1146.

²³¹*Ibid.*, III, 1147.

²³²*Ibid.*, III, 1164.

²³³*Ibid.*, III, 1231.

²³⁴*Ibid.*, III, 1164.

five years and will be buried next to Moses or in ‘Ā’isha’s house.²³⁵ Another *ḥadīth* situates Jesus in Muhammad’s grave from which both of them will ‘arise from one grave between [the graves of] Abū Bakr and ‘Umar’.²³⁶

3.3 A physical description of Jesus

Jesus is described as a well-built man²³⁷ with a broad chest²³⁸ who is of average height.²³⁹ The *ḥadīths* that describe His hair provide a wide range of characteristics including that it is earlobe-length²⁴⁰ or between His ears and His shoulders²⁴¹ or shoulder-length²⁴² or long;²⁴³ it is combed,²⁴⁴ crisp²⁴⁵ or straight²⁴⁶ or limp²⁴⁷ or curly²⁴⁸ or not too curly²⁴⁹ or beautiful locks²⁵⁰ of dry red hair²⁵¹ that is

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 1237.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 1160.

²³⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.316.

²³⁸ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.648.

²³⁹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.54.462; 4.55.607; 4.55.608; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.317; 1.75.322; Abū Dawud, *Sunan*, Book 37, Number 4310.

²⁴⁰ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7.72.789; 9.87.128.

²⁴¹ Al-Malik, *Muwatta*, tr. ‘Ā’isha ‘Abdaraḥman and Ya’qub Johnson, 49.2.2.

²⁴² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.469; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.76.324.

²⁴³ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 9.87.128.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.72.789; 9.87.128.

²⁴⁵ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.317.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.76.325; 1.76.327.

²⁴⁷ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.54.462; 4.55.469; 4.55.650; 9.87.153; 9.88.242.

²⁴⁸ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.608; 4.55.648; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.316.

²⁴⁹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.76.324.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.76.323.

²⁵¹ Abū Dawud, *Sunan*, Book 37, Number 4310.

dripping with water.²⁵² A similar range of descriptions of His complexion is provided including that He is the most fair²⁵³ or white²⁵⁴ or wheat-coloured²⁵⁵ or whitish-brown²⁵⁶ or the best brown²⁵⁷ or the most handsome dark²⁵⁸ or whitish-red²⁵⁹ or red²⁶⁰ ‘as if he has just come out of a bathroom’,²⁶¹ possibly because He had been reddened from a hot bath. He wears two light yellow garments,²⁶² leans on two men as He circumambulates the Ka‘ba²⁶³ and looks like ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd²⁶⁴ al-Thaqafi (d. 9/630).²⁶⁵ The *Mishkāt* adds that pearl-like beads scatter when Jesus

²⁵² Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.469; 4.55.650; 7.72.789; 9.87.128; 9.87.153; 9.88.242; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.76.323; 1.76.325; 1.76.327; Abū Dawud, *Sunan*, 37.4310.

²⁵³ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.317; 1.75.322; 1.76.325; 1.75.327.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.76.324.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.76.323.

²⁵⁶ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7.72.789.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.55.469; 4.55.650; 7.72.789.

²⁵⁸ Al-Malik, *Muwatta*, 49.2.2.

²⁵⁹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.54.462; 9.87.128; 9.87.153; 9.88.242; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.317.

²⁶⁰ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.607; 4.55.648.

²⁶¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.607; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.322.

²⁶² Abū Dawud, *Sunan*, Book 37, Number 4310.

²⁶³ Al-Malik, *Muwatta*, 49.2.2.

²⁶⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.75.321 41.21.7023.

²⁶⁵ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.76.328; date from C.E. Bosworth, ‘Urwa b. Mas‘ūd,’ *Et*².

raises His head²⁶⁶ and that He is the best looking man,²⁶⁷ who looks like ‘Alī²⁶⁸ or Abū Dharr.²⁶⁹

3.4 Comparisons between Jesus and Muhammad

Respect is diminished for Jesus when Muhammad explains that Jesus is among «those they pray to (Q. 17.57)» in vain.²⁷⁰ Jesus is not the only one who spoke when He was a baby;²⁷¹ two other babies spoke.²⁷² In response to ‘Umar’s command, ‘Do not claim to be the offspring of other than your fathers’, (Muhammad may have remembered that the Qur’an names Jesus as the offspring of His mother), Muhammad said ‘Do not praise me excessively, as Jesus, son of Mary was praised, but call me Allah’s Slave and His Apostle.’²⁷³ The āya,

«I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan (Q. 3.36)»,

is commonly accepted to mean that Jesus is sinless, is explained as meaning that every baby, except for Mary and Jesus, cries when they are pricked by Satan.²⁷⁴ The

²⁶⁶ Al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkāṭ*, III, 1146.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 1151.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 1342.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 1372-3.

²⁷⁰ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.60.238; 6.60.239.

²⁷¹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.83.378.

²⁷² Similar reports in Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4.55.645 and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 32.2.6188 say that two unnamed baby boys of unnamed mothers spoke.

²⁷³ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 8.82.817.

²⁷⁴ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 30.37.5837; 30.37.5838; 30.37.5839; 33.6.6429.

Mishkāt states that ‘all the descendants of Adam have their sides pierced by the devil with two of his fingers at birth, except the son of Mary.’²⁷⁵ After the people had unsuccessfully appealed to several other messengers in the order in which Allah had sent them, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, they appealed to Muhammad, whose intercession is accepted by Allah on Judgment Day.²⁷⁶

3.5 Observations on Jesus as depicted in the ḥadīths

There are about as many ḥadīths concerning Jesus as there are Qur’anic āyas about Him. Very few new ḥadīths are found outside the Ṣaḥīḥ compilations. The *Mishkāt* presents half a dozen difficult sayings concerning Judgment Day, adds an element to His physical description and mentions that Satan pierces the side of babies with two fingers. Abū Dā’ūd mentions that Jesus conducts *jihād* and has red hair. Everything else can also be found in the Ṣaḥīḥ compilations. Six of the 47 ḥadīths found in the compilation of al-Bukharī are from Book 60, which is entitled ‘Prophetic Commentary on the Qur’an’, meaning that these sayings were specifically intended to explain the Qur’an.

While the Qur’an is concerned with the birth of Jesus and arguing that He is entirely human, the ḥadīth corpus mostly focuses on Jesus in heaven or descending

²⁷⁵ Al-Tibrizī, *Mishkāt*, III, 1225.

²⁷⁶ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6.60.003; 6.60.236; 8.76.570; 9.93.507; 9.93.532v; 9.93.601 does not include Noah; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1.83.373; 1.83.378; 1.83.377 and 1.83.380 do not include Noah.

from heaven. The Night Journey bears a vague resemblance to the chariot of fire that took the Jewish prophet Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1-14). The *ḥadīths* that mention the Night Journey add meat to the skeleton that is obliquely mentioned in Q. 17.1. These accretions add Jesus, who is not mentioned anywhere in that *sūra*, to the story. It is also discovered that heaven has seven levels and eight gates. They show that Muhammad is purified from sin at the beginning of the Night Journey to heaven where he meets the sinless Jesus.

Although '[t]he doctrine which occupies the most prominent place in the Qur'an is that of the Last Judgment',²⁷⁷ the Qur'an only ties Jesus to Judgment Day in Q. 4.159 and 43.61. However, according to the *ḥadīth*, Jesus has very specific and prominent roles on Judgment Day. Jesus providing testimony in heaven on the Day of Resurrection that is mentioned in Q. 4.159 is interpreted to mean that Jesus returns to earth as a judge. This change opens the door for all sorts of accretions. He appears at the white minaret on the east wall of the Great Umayyad Mosque of Damascus and then He kills the Antichrist at the Ludd Gate. Built on the site of the former Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, the Umayyad Mosque was completed in 96/715. The white minaret on the east wall, known as the Minaret of Jesus, is the oldest and tallest of the three minarets. The Ludd Gate is the northeastern gate of

²⁷⁷ Dwight Baker, "Islam and Judaeo-Christian Tradition: The Significance of Qur'anic and Biblical Parallels", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, XIV:1 (1982), 47.

al-Ramla.²⁷⁸ Ludd/Lyddā is the place where the Apostle Peter miraculously healed Aeneas of paralysis (Acts 9:32-5) and it is the hometown of St. George. The apostle John coined the title Antichrist for the ‘man of sin’ who opposes Jesus in the epistles entitled 1 John and 2 John. Jesus also destroys everything other than Islam while miraculously employing insects, birds and rain.

The presence of both Jesus and Muhammad in most of these stories invites a comparison.²⁷⁹ Their equality is demonstrated by both of them being included in the *shahāda*, being buried in the same grave and being recognized as prophets. Adding a phrase concerning Jesus to the *shahāda* obtains a benefit that is not available to those who recite the *shahāda* with only the names of Allah and Muhammad, thus demonstrating Jesus’ superiority. Muhammad’s superiority is shown when his intercession on Judgment Day is accepted, while those who prayed to Jesus are said to have prayed in vain. Yet, ‘the Qur’an both rejects the idea of an

²⁷⁸“Ludd,” *EL*²; Donald Whitcomb, “The Rise of Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land” in Thomas E. Levy, *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (London: Continuum, 1998), 492; Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 135. Ramla/Ludd/Lyddā/Lod are suburbs of Jaffa/Joppa, modern day Tel Aviv, which is about 140 miles southeast of Damascus and 40 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

²⁷⁹ Neal Robinson, “Jesus and Mary in the Qur’an: Some Neglected Affinities” *Religion* 20 (Apr 1990): 165-7 and Robinson, “Perspectives”, 98 makes several comparisons from just the Qur’an.

intercession and allows nothing else to help a person in that state of helplessness except God's own mercy, which, the Qur'ān repeats, is absolutely unlimited'.²⁸⁰

Jesus loses His uniqueness as the only baby who spoke, the significance of His being untouched by Satan is reduced to meaning only that He does not cry, and His status is diminished when it is said that he should be named after His father. On the other hand, Jesus is demonstrably superior to Muhammad since Muhammad's sinful heart is purified and because Jesus is a sign of Judgment Day. Furthermore, Muhammad declares that Jesus is a superior soul and he demonstrates his inferiority to Jesus by repeating Jesus' words and by coughing, stopping his recitation and bowing when he recites the name of Jesus in Q. 23.50.

It is reported that Jesus looks like 'Alī, Abū Dharr and 'Urwa B. Mas'ūd al-Thaqafi. 'Alī is described as:

"Alī is represented as bald, affected by ophthalmia, stout, short-legged and broad-shouldered, with a hairy body and a long white beard covering his chest. In manner he was rough and brusque, apt to give offence and unsociable."²⁸¹

This description is quite different from the composite description of Jesus given in the *ḥadiths* above. Robson reports that Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 31/652), the

²⁸⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis: Biblioteca Islamica, 1980), 108.

²⁸¹ L. Veccia Vaglieri, "'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib," *El'*.

fifth convert to Islam, is said to resemble Jesus in terms of asceticism and humility.²⁸² A description of Ibn Mas'ūd is not readily available.

The references to Constantinople, Damascus and yellow garments are anachronistic. Although the Umayyads tried to conquer Constantinople, it is unlikely that Muhammad held that hope. Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature focuses on Jerusalem, just as one would expect Muslims to situate Judgment Day in Mecca, so the reference to the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus appears to be an Umayyad anachronism even though the transmitter is the Companion al-Nawwās b. Sam'ān al-Kilābī. It might be that both the *matn* (body of text) and the *isnād* (chain of transmission) are late fabrications. The *dhimmī* (non-Muslim living under a covenant of protection) status implied by yellow garments did not exist during Muhammad's lifetime and may not have been ushered in by the *Pact of 'Umar*, which itself may be anachronistic.²⁸³ While anachronisms bring

²⁸² J. Robson, "Abū Dharr," *EI*².

²⁸³ Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: from surrender to coexistence* (NY: Cambridge, 2011) shows that Syrian and Egyptian cities originally obtained surrender treaties while Iranian cities obtained vassal treaties (46) both of which followed terms that had been common in the area for 2,500 years (164), as did the Sassanian treaties of only 20 years earlier (165). As Muslims moved from the new garrisons towns into the conquered cities (165), a process of renegotiating of the use of public space ensued (parades, call to prayer, display of the crucifix, and the sale of wine and pork) (166) commencing during the reign of Umayyad Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd-al-'Aziz (r. 98/717-101/720) and concluding during the reign of 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 232/847-247/861) (168). The result of this process

into doubt Muhammad's association with these *ḥadīth*, it does not question whether medieval Muslims believed them to be 'true'.

Jesus is depicted as a good Muslim *ḥajjī-imām-mujāhid* (holy warrior)-*qāḍī* (judge) on Judgment Day. Jesus performs the *ḥajj*, leads Muslims in prayer, defeats the Antichrist, abolishes Christianity and condemns Christians to Hell for lying and for excessively praising Him while He rewards Muslims with Paradise, especially those who have converted from Christianity. Although He graciously wipes the faces of the believers, that pleasure is short-lived since His harsh judgment only admits one out of a thousand Muslims into heaven. Wearing the yellow garments of a *dhimmī* seems entirely incongruous for this exemplary Muslim Jesus.

Ḥadīth accept some of what Christianity understands about the Second Coming, the Antichrist and the judgment of Jesus. No reasons are given for why Jesus, rather than Muhammad, is so honoured with these roles. The *ḥadīth* do not reveal how a non-divine Jesus warrants or is able to exercise such power and authority.

is the *Shurūt 'Umar*, which is a 9th century 'Abbasid document that copies the Sassanian class system that lacks inter-class mobility (167).

Chapter 4-A summary of how Jesus is treated in the *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*

The *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) is the earliest extant biography of Muhammad. Since the manuscript of Ibn Ishāq has been lost, we have only the later recension of his work compiled by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833).²⁸⁴ The *Sīra* includes several reports about ‘occasions of revelation’ (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and a commentary on the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative that responds to a contingent of Christians from Najrān. (Henceforth, the reference to a single occasion of revelation of an individual *āya* or a group of *āyas* will be abbreviated as *sabab* (pl. *asbāb*)). The *Sīra* includes several references to a discussion that the Negus of Abyssinia had concerning the nature of Jesus, an embellishment of the Night Journey and several other references to Jesus. Most of this material elucidates topics that are raised cryptically in the Qur’an while the comments on the Night Journey supplement the *ḥadīths*.

4.1 *Sūra* 3

An unnamed unimpeachable scholar states in the *Sīra* that *Sūra* 3 was ‘sent down about the people of Najrān when they came to Muhammad to ask him about

²⁸⁴ W. Raven, “*Sīra*,” *El*². Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, ed. Ibn Hishām, tr. Alfred Guillaume as *The Life of Muhammad*, 1970 impression (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), xiv-xv.

Jesus, son of Mary.²⁸⁵ Another *sabab* mentions that the first eighty āyas were sent down for the Christians of Najrān because they worship the cross, eat pork and claim that Allah has a son. ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, al-Ayham and Abu’l-Ḥāritha b. ‘Alqama lead sixty Orthodox Christians from Najrān to Medina in order to talk with Muhammad about Jesus. Although Abu’l-Ḥāritha acknowledges that Muhammad is ‘the prophet we have been waiting for’, he is not able to submit to Muhammad’s leadership because he is indebted to Heraclius for building his churches, providing his servants, subsidising his operation and lavishing him with honours. Some of these Orthodox Christians from Najrān argue that Jesus is God because He performs miracles; others argue He is the Son of God because He has no father; and still others argue that the appearance of the Hebrew plural *Elohim* (God) and the related plural pronoun, We, in the Genesis creation account shows that Jesus is the third person of the Trinity. This last position is articulated as follows:

They argue that he is the third of three in that God says: We have done, We have commanded, We have created and We have decreed, and they say, If He were one he would have said I have done, I have created, and soon, but

²⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 257 re: Q. 3.5. The Arabic text can be found on page 378 of the ‘excellent *textus receptus*’ (see p. xli of Guillaume) entitled *Kitāb Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, authored by Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq, redacted by ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, and somewhat critically edited by Heinrich Ferdinand Wüstenfeld (Göttingen : Dieterische Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1858-60). For the remainder of Chapter 4, the page number in this Arabic source is found in brackets following the page of the English translation.

He is He and Jesus and Mary. Concerning all these assertions the Quran came down.²⁸⁶

The *Sīra* makes it clear that Muhammad's meeting with the Najrānī contingent was not a respectful dialogue among equals, but that he confronted the Christians with a litany of polemical arguments and a demand for their complete submission that culminated in āya 64. *Sūra* 3 starts with the argument that because Christians eat pork, worship the cross and assert that God has a son, they are not submitting to Allah, who has no associate. Since Allah is 'Ever Living' and Christians believe that Jesus was crucified unto death, Jesus cannot be the 'Ever Living' Allah. Since Allah remains sovereign over creation and Christians believe that Jesus set aside His divinity, Jesus cannot be Allah. Those who do not believe in the Qur'an will suffer. Christians are disingenuous because they really know that Jesus is not divine. Jesus cannot be Allah because, unlike Allah, Jesus 'was formed in the womb'. Christians 'arbitrarily' use 'ambiguous' verses to explain 'plain' verses in order to support doctrines that they 'invented'. Arguing that the Godhead is plural because the Genesis creation account uses plural pronouns referring to God is a 'specious argument devoid of truth.' Although Allah works miracles through Jesus, Allah does not give Jesus power over celestial bodies or earthly kings, as Jesus aptly demonstrates by wandering the countryside to avoid civil authority.

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 270-2 [403]; the original conflates 'so on' into 'soon',

Christians should obey Muhammad because the Holy Bible prophesies his coming.

As a prelude to the development of the doctrine of the corruption of the Holy Bible

(*taḥrīf*) by the eleventh-century Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064),²⁸⁷ the Qur'anic

Annunciation 'corrects' the Christian account. By saying 'Allah is My Lord', Jesus

proves that He is not Allah:

'And I bring you signs from your Lord, so fear God and obey me. God is my Lord and your Lord,' i.e. disowning what they say about him and proving that his Lord (is God). 'So worship Him.'²⁸⁸

Then the disciples of Jesus declare that they are Muslims:

The disciples said: We are God's helpers. 'We believe in God.' This is their saying by which they gained favour from their Lord. 'And bear witness that we are Muslims'²⁸⁹

Jesus is not the Son of God because He has no father; Allah also created Adam

without a father. Muhammad enjoins the Najrānī Christians to invoke a curse upon

whichever party is the liar, so 'Abd al-Masīḥ declares that it is self-evident that

Muhammad is a prophet of Allah who properly 'corrects' Christian dogma, but

since invoking the curse would exterminate the church, he orders the Christians to

return home instead.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Ryan Shaffner is writing a dissertation at Ohio State University demonstrating that the ninth-century Yemenī Zaydī al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 246/860) already treated the Gospels as having been corrupted.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 276 [408] re: Q. 3.51.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, re: Q. 3.52.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.* [401-11], 272-7.

4.2 The Negus of Abyssinia

When some Muslims sought refuge with the Abyssinians from persecution at the hands of the Meccans in 615AD, Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 7/629) read the *Sūra* 19 nativity narrative and 'The Negus wept until his beard was wet and the bishops wept until their scrolls were wet'.²⁹¹ Fifteen years later, Muhammad sends his Companions with letters to neighboring nations just as Jesus sends forth His disciples:

Peter the disciple and Paul with him, (Paul belonged to the followers and was not a disciple) to Rome; Andrew and Matthew to the land of the cannibals; Thomas to the land of Babel which is in the land of the east; Philip to Carthage which is Africa; John to Ephesus the city of the young men of the cave; James to Jerusalem which is Aelia the city of the sanctuary; Bartholomew to Arabia which is the land of the Ḥijāz; Simon to the land of the Berbers; Judah who was not one of the disciples was put in the place of Judas.²⁹²

Because the disciples whom Jesus sends to distant lands wait until Allah enables them to speak the native language, Muhammad warns his Companions not to disobey his command to propagate the faith as the disciples of Jesus had.²⁹³ During the last few months of his life, Muhammad sends letters to the kings of Balqā' (N.W.

²⁹¹*Ibid.*, 152 [220] re: *Sūra* 19.

²⁹²*Ibid.*, 653 [972]. The *Sīra* does not mention where James the Lesser, Thaddeus, or Matthias were sent.

²⁹³*Ibid.*, 653; 788n. 900.

Jordan),²⁹⁴ Yemen, Bahrain, 'Umān, Alexandria, Constantinople,²⁹⁵ Damascus,²⁹⁶

Abyssinia,²⁹⁷ and Persia with several of his Companions that start with Q. 3.64:

«Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him.' (Q. 3.64)»

Thus, he invites them to submit to Allah and to himself.²⁹⁸ One of the recipients of these letters was the Negus of Abyssinia, who, since *Sūra* 5.82 had been sent down for him,²⁹⁹ is already familiar with Islam when the letter arrives. The Negus praises

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 652 [970].

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 653. The Arabic text can be found on page 1560 of volume I of the *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari* [Latin title of the *Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*] authored by al-Ṭabarī, edited by M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879-1901 and reprinted at Leiden: Lugd. Bat.: Brill, 1964-65) (see p. xxxi and xxxiii of Guillaume and pages x and 141-2 of vol. 1 of al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, various translators (Albany: SUNY, 1985-99)). The 40 volume English translation is derived from three Arabic series. The first 17 English volumes derive from the 3476 pages in the Arabic series 1, which consists of the first 6 volumes. English volumes XVIII through page 124 of volume XXVII derive from the 2017 pages of the Arabic series II, which consists of 3 volumes. The remaining English volumes derive from about 2500 pages of the Arabic volume III, which consists of 4 volumes. For the remainder of Chapter 4 and 5, the page numbers in this Arabic source follow the page of the English translation, e.g. 653 [Ṭ, I, 1560].

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 657 [Ṭ, I, 1568].

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 657 [Ṭ, I, 1569]. All of the locations in this sentence are also mentioned on 788-9n. 900.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 657 [Ṭ, I, 1569].

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 179 [259] re: Q. 5.85.

Muhammad's description of Jesus from the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative and testifies that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.³⁰⁰

4.3 The Night Journey

Concerning Muhammad's *Sūra* 17.1 Night Journey (*isrā'*) and ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*), Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693) says that after climbing a ladder to Paradise with the Angel Gabriel, Muhammad meets the Archangel Izrā'īl, the commander of Allah's army of 144,000,000 angels, who lets them in. The angel Mālik, the sombre custodian of Hell, opens Hell's gates so that Muhammad can observe its flames. Adam, those who oppress orphans, Pharaoh's family, usurers (possibly Jews), homosexuals and adulteresses who gave birth to bastards reside in the lowest heaven. Only one level higher than these abject sinners, Muhammad finds Jesus and John the Baptist, while Joseph, Idrīs (Enoch), Aaron the handsome son of 'Imrān, and then Moses the dark son of 'Imrān each resides on successively higher levels.³⁰¹

4.4 Miscellaneous reports concerning Jesus

Three āyas were sent down because the Jews did not acknowledge that Jesus was a prophet. One *sabab* states that when seven Jews asked Muhammad which prophets he believed in, Allah sent down Q. 3.84 telling Muhammad to 'correct'

³⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 657 [T, I, 1569].

³⁰¹*Ibid.*, 184-7 [268-71].

them by saying that he made no distinction between Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus.³⁰² Two Jews recognize only what Allah had revealed until the time of Moses, so Q. 4.163-5 was sent down in order to provide Muhammad with a response that Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon and David were among the many messengers that Allah had sent.³⁰³ Because the Jews denied that Jesus is a prophet, Allah sent down Q. 5.59:³⁰⁴

«Say [Prophet], ‘People of the Book, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, in what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent before us, while most of you are disobedient?’ (Q. 5.59)»

Muhammad states anachronistically that Jesus is the itinerant healer whom Salmān the Persian, one of Muhammad’s Companions, meets in Syria.³⁰⁵ Jesus is Allah’s obedient slave through whom He performs miraculous signs, but Christians pervert Jesus’ message, worship Him and will be punished in Gehenna.³⁰⁶ At al-‘Aqaba, Muhammad says somewhat cryptically that he is responsible for the Muslims just as the disciples of Jesus are responsible to Jesus:

‘Abdullah b. Abū Bakr told me that the apostle said to the Leaders: ‘You are the sureties for your people just as the disciples of Jesus, Son of Mary, were

³⁰²*Ibid.*, 268 [396] re: Q. 3.58.

³⁰³*Ibid.*, 265 [392] re: Q. 4.161.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 268 [396] re: Q. 3.64.

³⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 98 [142-3].

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 163-4 [236-7].

responsible to him, while I am responsible for my people, i.e., the Muslims'.³⁰⁷

Jesus proves that the Jewish religious leaders are wrong about the Torah and the Gospel.³⁰⁸ *Sūra* 2.87-8 is paraphrased saying that the Jews have such hard hearts that they kill some of their messengers.³⁰⁹ Muhammad erases all of the icons that the Quraysh have painted in the Ka'ba except the icon of Jesus and Mary,³¹⁰ which he takes for himself.³¹¹

4.5 Observations on Jesus as depicted in the *Sīra*

On the surface, the *Sīra* is a biography. Nonetheless, Wansbrough explains that it is not only exegetical, but that it contains twenty-three traditional polemical motifs.³¹² All the way from His birth through His many titles, the Qur'an argues that Jesus is exclusively human. The *ḥadīths* provide stories about Jesus meeting Muhammad in heaven then descending to earth on Judgment Day. The *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq situates the Qur'anic material about Jesus in the context of disputations with Christian contingents from Abyssinia and Najrān, and to a lesser

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 204 [299].

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 253-4 [373].

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 254 [373].

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 552; the Arabic text can be found in vol. I page 107 of the *Akhbār Makka* of al-Azraqi.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 774n. 806.

³¹² Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of the Qur'ān, *Tafsīr*, and *Sīra*: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough", in ed. Richard C. Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 162.

degree with the Jews, in order to ‘correct’ their beliefs. The *Sīra* also mentions the Night Journey where it adds to the confusion about ‘Imrān by identifying Aaron and Moses as his sons.

In the *Sīra*, the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative was revealed so that Muhammad could ‘correct’ the Najrānī Christians who believe that Jesus is God. The *Sīra* interprets the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative as providing fifteen polemical arguments against the Christian dogma of the divinity of Jesus. The Christians are challenged to invoke a curse against whichever of them is lying about Allah’s revelation of the nature of Jesus. Despondent, the Christians acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad, but stick with what Ibn Ishāq considers to be their lie, do not invoke the curse, and return home.

Sūra 3.64 is cited four times to challenge Christians. Muhammad challenged the Christians at Najrān in 10/632 because they maintained that Jesus is the Son of God.³¹³ Muhammad re-issues this challenge to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius and eight other kings later that same year.³¹⁴ The Negus of Abyssinia was prepared for a letter starting with 3.64, because Q. 5.82 and the *Sūra* 19 nativity narrative had already been revealed for him. Like the Najrānī contingent, he acknowledges the prophethood of Muhammad.

³¹³ Asad, *Qur’an*, 90n. 48.

³¹⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, 653 [Ṭ, I, 1560].

The ‘Abbasid caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) commissions one of his theologians, Abu’l-Rabī‘ Muḥammad b. al-Layth (d. 203/819), to write a letter starting with Q. 3.64 to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI in 173-180/790-7 requiring him to convert to Islam or pay the *jizya* (head tax on a *dhimmī*) or suffer *jihād*, the last of which comes upon him in 180/797.³¹⁵

Colby explains that the Night Journey demonstrates that Muhammad is much more important than Jesus. His analysis of eight versions of the *Mi‘rāj* shows that Jesus is found on the first and second levels of heaven three times each and on the third and sixth levels once each; Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Ismā‘īl, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, David, Solomon, John the Baptist and Hūd are mentioned as residents of paradise. The Q. 17.1 Night Journey (*isrā*) and ascension (*mi‘rāj*) empowers Muhammad by revealing to him secrets from other worlds. This is a triumphal account in which Muhammad is endorsed by several pre-Islamic prophets, he leads prayers and receives the personal attention of the three most important angels, the angel Gabriel, the death angel ‘Izrā‘īl and the guardian of Hell, Mālik. Formulated to compete with accounts that Enoch and Noah walked

³¹⁵*Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1 (600-900), ed. David Thomas and Barbara Roggema (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 347, 349, 351; Muḥammad ibn al-Layth, “Risālat Abī’l-Rabī‘ Muḥammad ibn al-Layth allatī katabahā li-l-Rashīd ilā Qunṣṭanṭīn malik al-Rūm”, in Aḥmad Farīd al-Rifā‘ī, *‘Aṣr al-Ma’mūn*, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1928), 188.

with God and Paul walked with God in the third heaven, the *Mi'rāj* provides a tool for proselytization. The negotiations between Muhammad and Allah in the seventh heaven are reminiscent of Abraham's negotiation with God on behalf of Lot. It is while Muhammad visits paradise that the daily communal life of Muslims acquires its five daily prayers.³¹⁶

The *Sīra* places all of the prophets, except Adam and John the Baptist, at higher levels than Jesus. The Night Journey shows that Muhammad and many other prophets are far superior to Jesus and so it significantly reduces the importance of Jesus by making him equal to John the Baptist and just barely more righteous than the abject sinners on the first level. The place of Jesus during the Night Journey does not cohere at all with the Qur'anic Jesus or with how the *ḥadīth* depict Jesus on Judgment Day.

While nothing is said about the Jews not believing in the prophethood of John the Baptist or his father Zachariah, three *āyās* 'correct' the Jews who do not acknowledge the prophethood of Jesus. If the Jews are correct in accusing Mary of being an adulteress who gave birth to a bastard, then on the evidence of the *Sīra* previously mentioned, she should be found on the lowest level of heaven.

³¹⁶ Frederick S. Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey* (NY: SUNY, 2008), 138-41, 166-7, 171-2; Enoch (Genesis 5:22, 24), Noah (Genesis 6:9), Lot (Genesis 18:22-33), Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2).

The *Sīra* shows that Christians are unwilling to answer the Q. 3.61 challenge that they are lying about the divinity of Jesus and the Q. 3.64 challenge to agree to worship Allah alone. The *Sīra* shows the superiority of Islam over Christianity by having both the Najrānī contingent and the Negus acknowledging the prophethood of Muhammad, by the Negus admitting that he is lying about the divinity of Jesus and by depicting virtually all of the prophets as deserving higher places in heaven than Jesus.

In conclusion, the *Sīra* portrays Islam as being the middle way between the errors of the Christians, who exalt Jesus too highly, and the errors of the Jews, who do not recognize that Jesus is a prophet.

Chapter 5-A Summary of how Jesus is treated in the *Ta'rikh* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)

The *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī is the earliest extant comprehensive Muslim world history. It discusses the time in history when Jesus appeared along with stories about His birth and miracles. Al-Ṭabarī also mentions a few oaths sworn in the name of Jesus, provides some additional information about the letters that, according to Muslim tradition, Muhammad sent to kings and makes a few comparisons between Jesus and Muhammad.

5.1 Jesus' time in history

Allah sent the same message through Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad,³¹⁷ the unbroken line of prophets, even though prophecy did not commence until Abraham's grandson Jacob³¹⁸ or Moses.³¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī presents a wide and implausible spectrum of dates concerning when Jesus was born.³²⁰ Al-Ṭabarī

³¹⁷Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, various translators (Albany: SUNY, 1985-99), V, 275 [Ṭ, I, 973].

³¹⁸*Ibid.*, II, 133 [Ṭ, I, 353].

³¹⁹*Ibid.*, III, 110-1 [Ṭ, I, 528].

³²⁰Allah sent a thousand prophets between Moses and Jesus, an interval of 600 (V, 413), 1,232 (V, 416) or 1,900 years (V, 414). Jesus was born 51 years after the rise of Alexander the Great (51 years after his reign started in 336 is 285BC) (IV, 108) or 303 years afterwards (which is 33BC) (IV, 95, 127) or 65 or 303 years after Alexander conquered Babylon (which would be 226 or 28BC based on a 331BC conquest of Babylon) (IV, 102) or 51 years after Ptolemy rose to power (252BC is 51 years after 303BC) (IV, 100) or 42 or 43 years into the reign of Augustus (15-16AD is

states that the *Sūra* 18 sleepers of the cave were Christians practising Jesus' religion of Islam, but he was not sure whether they lived before or after the time of Jesus.³²¹ He also mentions anachronistically that Saint George of Lydda (d. 303AD) was martyred in the fourth century under Diocletian (d. 311, r. 285-305) while the last of the disciples of Jesus were still alive.³²² Hence, the encyclopaedic approach to historical evidence taken by al-Ṭabarī leads to a very wide range of dates for the birth of Jesus—from 285BC to 250AD.³²³

5.2 Nativity narrative

Al-Ṭabarī supplements the *Sūra* 3 and *Sūra* 19 nativity narratives with some additional details. 'Imrān b. Māthan or 'Imrān b. Josiah died after his wife Ḥannā had conceived Mary and then when Ḥannā died, Zachariah took care of the orphan

42-3 years after 27BC) (IV, 124, 95). There were 551 years between the birth of Jesus and the mission of Muhammad (59AD) (V, 416) or 569 years between their births (1AD) (V, 414) or 585 years between the Ascension of Jesus and the *hijra* (4AD) (IV, 127) or 600 years between their deaths (0AD) (V, 413).

³²¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 155-6 [Ṭ, I, 778].

³²² *Ibid.*, IV, 173, 173n. 416.

³²³ A consequence of this encyclopaedic approach is discussed in 8.3 below. A similar approach is taken by al-Bīrūnī (d. 439/1048) in his *Āthār al-bāqīya*, tr. C. Edward Sachau (London: William H. Allen and Co., 1879), 20-1, 33, 290. Jesus was born 1,304 years after the exodus (150BC), 344 years after Daniel's vision (190BC), 526 years after the beginning of the reign of Cyrus (4BC), and 304 years after the beginning of the reign of Alexander (19BC). Jesus was born during the daytime of Monday the 25th of an unnamed month, which is nine months and five days after Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary. Jesus' birth was 17 years into the reign of Caesar (10BC), who is so named because his mother's 'womb was opened by the "Caesarean operation," and he was drawn forth, and got his surname "Caesar."'

Mary.³²⁴ Mary and her cousin Joseph were working in the Temple³²⁵ on the longest and hottest day of the year when she needed to go to fetch water from a cave³²⁶ where the Spirit of Allah,³²⁷ the Angel Gabriel, appeared to her as a shapely man.³²⁸ Mary conceived Jesus when Allah said 'Be' or when Gabriel breathed into her womb through an opening in her garment or he breathed (directly) into her bosom³²⁹ or he breathed into her bosom through an opening in her garment.³³⁰ Mary alleviated Joseph's distress about her Immaculate Conception.³³¹ The appearance of an unknown star as prophesied in the Book of Daniel prompted a group of men to carry gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus.³³² Mary gave birth at 'the eastern side of the prayer niche'³³³ or she journeyed to near Egypt where her difficult labour was eased by the embrace of angels³³⁴ and the falling of dates from palm trees, even though it was winter.³³⁵ Idols were turned upside down³³⁶ and devils fled to the

³²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, IV, 102-3 [Ṭ, I, 711-2].

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 112, 113 [Ṭ, I, 723, 725].

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 112 [Ṭ, I, 723-4].

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 119 [Ṭ, I, 732].

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 112, 113, 119 [Ṭ, I, 724, 732].

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, 113 [Ṭ, I, 725].

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, IV, 119 [Ṭ, I, 732-3].

³³¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 113-4 [Ṭ, I, 725-6].

³³² *Ibid.*, IV, 116 [Ṭ, I, 728-9].

³³³ *Ibid.*, IV, 119 [Ṭ, I, 733].

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, 114 [Ṭ, I, 727].

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 114-5 [Ṭ, I, 727].

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 115-6, 120 [Ṭ, I, 727, 734-5].

deep green sea where Iblīs was so frightened that he searched the entire earth, in only three hours, hoping to determine how Jesus could have been born without his knowledge.³³⁷ The Jews accused Zachariah of committing adultery with Mary, the sister of Aaron.³³⁸

5.3 Jesus' miracles

The family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus continued their journey to Egypt, where they stayed for twelve years and where Jesus performed his first miracles.³³⁹ Jesus 'miraculously' solves the riddle of how a blind man and a cripple man worked together to steal a treasure from a high place within the house of an Egyptian dignitary; His second feat was to miraculously fill two rows of jars with wine for the wedding of that dignitary's son.³⁴⁰ Iblīs and two other devils merged into one 'old and respectable man' in order to tempt Jesus.³⁴¹ Jesus is the only one Who raised the dead.³⁴² The disciples of Jesus asked to speak to someone who witnessed Noah's flood, so Jesus struck the grave of Ham with His staff. Ham then described the Ark as being a three-storey boat with the extraordinary dimensions of 1,200 cubits by

³³⁷*Ibid.*, IV, 115-6 [T, I, 728]

³³⁸*Ibid.*, IV, 120 [T, I, 734].

³³⁹*Ibid.*, IV, 116 [T, I, 729-30].

³⁴⁰*Ibid.*, IV, 117 [T, I, 730].

³⁴¹*Ibid.*, IV, 118 [T, I, 731-2].

³⁴²*Ibid.*, III, 121 [T, I, 538].

600 cubits.³⁴³ Although ‘the Jews rejected the prophethood of Jesus’,³⁴⁴ Iblīs put into the minds of Christians that Jesus is God, the Son of God and a God along with Allah because Jesus healed as many as 50,000 sick people at a time.³⁴⁵

5.4 Oaths sworn in the name of Jesus

Jesus is affirmed through oaths and when Muslims use His behaviour as an example to follow. The Q. 5.78 curse of David and Jesus upon the unbelieving Jews was repeated during the 23/644 conquest of the Sassanid Empire³⁴⁶ when Jewish unbelief is compared to the unbelief of those who deny the existence of Paradise and Hell.³⁴⁷ In affirming that someone had spoken truthfully, Muṭarrif³⁴⁸ said ‘You speak truly, by the God of Moses and Jesus!’³⁴⁹ In passing judgment upon the leader of the Jahmiyya, a sect believing in the created Qur’an and predestination, Salm b. Aḥwaz³⁵⁰ said, ‘I would not give you protection [, e]ven if ... Jesus the son of Mary pronounced you guiltless.’³⁵¹ In pledging loyalty to the ‘Abbāsids in 132/750, the Shī‘īs in Kūfa acknowledged that the ‘Abbāsids would retain power until they

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, I, 357 [T, I, 187].

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 185 [T, I, 17].

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 118 [T, I, 731].

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, XIV, 157 [T, I, 33].

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, XXXVIII, 53-4 [T, III, 2170].

³⁴⁸ Date of death unknown.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XXII, 133 [T, II, 985].

³⁵⁰ Date of death unknown.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XXVII, 35 [T, II, 1924], 29n. 68.

surrender it to Jesus.³⁵² When he was interrogating judges who advocated the created Qur'an, the caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 218/833) illogically said that they 'talk just like the Christians when they claim that Jesus son of Mary was not created, because he was the Word of God.'³⁵³ Al-Ṭabarī includes a saying that whoever slanders Jesus is worthy of death.³⁵⁴

Starting in 278/851, the Qarāmiṭa copied Jesus' missionary style by sending twelve agents (*naqīb*)³⁵⁵ and preaching that Jesus is the *Logos*, the Messiah, the Mahdī, the angel Gabriel, and Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. 81/700), who is a messenger along with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.³⁵⁶ Muhammad said that Abū Bakr was like Jesus Who said:

«if thou punish them, lo! they are thy slaves, and if thou forgive them, (lo! they are thy slaves) (Q. 5.118 per the translation in the *Ta'rikh*).»³⁵⁷

5.5 The Negus of Abyssinia

Al-Ṭabarī adds some information to what the *Sīra* reports about Muhammad's letters saying that they were sent in 6/628, rather than 10/632, and that a letter was sent to the Banū Ghassān in Buṣrā, whose Christian leader in

³⁵²*Ibid.*, XXVII, 157 [Ṭ, III, 33].

³⁵³*Ibid.*, XXXII, 207 [Ṭ, III, 1118].

³⁵⁴*Ibid.*, XXXVIII, 44 [Ṭ, III, 2162].

³⁵⁵*Ibid.*, XXXVII, 169-70 [Ṭ, III, 2124].

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*, XXXVII, 173 [Ṭ, III, 2128].

³⁵⁷*Ibid.*, VII, 82 [Ṭ, I, 356].

central Arabia was aligned with the Persians.³⁵⁸ Al-Ṭabarī also adds that in response to Muhammad's statement that 'Jesus the son of Mary is the Spirit and Word of God', the Negus replied that 'Jesus does not exceed by a whit what you said';³⁵⁹ and to his recitation of the *shahāda*, the Negus added that Jesus had prophesied the coming of Muhammad.³⁶⁰

5.6 Observations on Jesus as depicted in the *Ta'riḫ* of al-Ṭabarī

The *Ta'riḫ* of al-Ṭabarī builds upon the Qur'anic skeleton of Jesus without touching on what the *ḥadīth* say about Jesus in heaven or His Second Coming or the polemical interpretation of Sūra 3 found in the *Sīra*. According to al-Ṭabarī, Jesus came with the same message as the earlier prophets and the Jews rejected Him and His message. Just as the ninth-century canonical *ḥadīth* compilations assembled thousands of *ḥadīth*, so did the ninth-century historian and commentator al-Ṭabarī. The stories discussed in this chapter are not found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* compilations, so they were not viewed by medieval Muslim scholars as being sound or reliable. This is evidenced by the wide range of opinion offered among the transmitters. Al-Ṭabarī often tells his readers which of the reports in his commentary he prefers, but he does not do so concerning the reports mentioned above. By including so

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 98 [Ṭ, I, 1559-60], 98n. 422-7.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 108-9 [Ṭ, I, 1569].

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, XXXIX, 177-9 [Ṭ, III, 2446].

many reports, al-Ṭabarī draws attention to mythological events, ambiguity, inconsistency, anachronism and error.

Central to the discipline of history is situating events in their proper time and in their proper relationships to each other. This must be done accurately before the events can be interpreted properly. Although Jesus was born only 574 years before Muhammad, al-Ṭabarī includes reports that show an incredible 535 year range. This is not to say that the global standard Gregorian calendar is without problems. During the sixth century, the traditional date of Jesus' nativity was established as being 1AD, but it is now widely accepted that Jesus was born in 4BC. Even though al-Ṭabarī lived three centuries after the traditional nativity date was established, his margin for error is over a hundred times as great as the Christian calendar. He includes reports that Jesus is born in the 42nd or 43rd year of the reign of Augustus, despite the fact that Augustus reigned for just over 40 years. The *Ta'riḫ* gives a specific date for St. George and says that the mythical seven sleepers practice the religion of Jesus before the time of Jesus.

Some Biblical data and fanciful legends are added by al-Ṭabarī to the *Sūra* 3 and *Sūra* 19 nativity narratives. 'Imrān dies while Mary's mother Ḥannā is pregnant and then she dies while Mary is an infant, so that Mary becomes an orphan, who is then entrusted into the care of her uncle Zachariah, just as is the case for

Muhammad. There is confusion about whether Mary's grandfather is named Māthan or Josiah and the confusion about Mary's relationship to Aaron/Imrān is exacerbated here. Zachariah is accused of the very un-prophet like behaviour of having sexual relations with his wife's teenage niece. The virtue of Mary is embellished beyond the piousness that prior sources have accorded her when it is mentioned that she works in the Temple, she explains to Joseph the ways of Allah concerning her pregnancy and she gives birth to Jesus either in a prayer-niche or in the presence of angels.

The supernatural realm is encountered with the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of a star that guides the Magi to Jesus, when a date tree bears fruit just for Mary during winter and when the activities of Iblīs are described. Iblīs frantically searches the world at the surprising arrival of Jesus, merges with two other devils into a respectable old man in order to tempt Jesus and then convinces people that Jesus' fanciful miracles prove that He is divine.

Care is taken to show that Jesus is not divine by showing that He prayed, that His disciples were able to make themselves equal to Him by drying their hands on His garments and that the Negus affirms the Qur'anic understanding of the nature of the person of Jesus. Nonetheless, He is more than human, for when Allah raises Him, He is angelic and He loses His need to eat and drink. The name of Jesus

is also invoked to validate several oaths in the same manner that one would swear by God and one oath prophesies that the ‘Abbasids will reign until the Second Coming.

Central to any history is accurate dating and that is sorely lacking in the *Ta’rīkh* of al-Ṭabarī. Unlike the compilers of *ḥadīths*, al-Ṭabarī makes no distinction between sound reports and legend, fascination with the supernatural, or even dates and stories that he just has to know are inaccurate. Nonetheless, not only does he portray Jesus as a precursor to Muhammad, he does the same with Mary. Mary’s righteous father dies while her righteous mother is pregnant then her mother dies while she is an infant, so she is raised by her righteous uncle.

Chapter 6-A summary of how Jesus is treated in the *Qışaş al-anbiyā'*

The *qışaş al-anbiyā'* literature is a genre that presents tales of the pre-Islamic prophets for personal edification and to provide examples that inspire pious living. This genre has always been a popular genre of literature all across the Muslim world. The compilations of al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1036), al-Kisā'ī, Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), al-Rabghūzī (d. 710/1310), Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) and Mīr Khvānd (d. 903/1498) are presented here.³⁶¹ They were originally composed in Spain, Syria, Persia, Afghanistan and central Asia in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Because the compilation by al-Tha'labī is the earliest, most extensive and most popular *qışaş*, it is mentioned first and that same information is not repeated from other *qışaş*.

³⁶¹ Abū Ishāq Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qışaş al-anbiyā'*, tr. by William M. Brinner as *Lives of the Prophets*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002) and by Arthur Jeffrey as "A Prophet Story" in *A Reader on Islam* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1962); Al-Kisā'ī, *Qışaş al-anbiyā'*, tr. W. M. Thackston, Jr. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978); date of death unknown; Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, French tr. by Titus Burckhardt, then English tr. by Angela Culme-Seymour as *The Wisdom of the Prophets* (Gloucestershire: Beshara Publications, 1975); Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, tr. 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman as *The Seals of Wisdom* (Norwich: Diwan Press, 1980); al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş al-anbiyā'*, tr. H.E. Boeschoten, J. O'Kane and M. Vandamme as *The Stories of the Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Robert Dankoff, "Rabghuzi's Stories of the Prophets" *JOAS* 117:1 (Jan-Mar 1997), 115; Ibn Kathīr, *Qışaş al-anbiyā'*, tr. Brannon M. Wheeler as *Prophets in the Quran* (N.Y.: Continuum, 2002); Muḥammad b. Khāvandshāh Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat-al-ṣafa [fī Sīrat al-anbiyā' wa'l-mulūk wa'l-khylafā]* tr. E. Rehatsek, v. 1 part 1 (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1891-3).

The *qışaṣ* about Jesus explain difficult terms and add to the body of what Muslims ‘know’ about pious people found in His genealogical line, His birth, miracles and Second Coming. The more than twenty miracles of Jesus in the *qışaṣ* exceed all of the miracles found in the Qur’an, *sīra*, *ḥadīth* and *ta’rīkh* combined, just as the *qışaṣ* provide a more complete story of the life of Jesus than do all of these sources. What the *qışaṣ* has to say about the crucifixion is discussed in Part II.

6.1 A few confusing definitions and cases of confused identity

A few things are so confusing that they demand clarification; unfortunately the range of meanings given for them by the *qışaṣ* is far from precise. The Abyssinian loan word *ḥawāriyyūn* indicates that the disciples of Jesus had a specialised trade³⁶² such as fishermen, sailors, bleachers³⁶³ or dyers.³⁶⁴ The term could also mean that their pure hearts are luminous or that the twelve are Jesus’ helpers or successors³⁶⁵ or advisors or partners.³⁶⁶

³⁶² Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaṣ*, 491.

³⁶³ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaṣ*, 654.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 655.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 655.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 654.

Jesus is referred to as the ‘spirit of Allah’ three times.³⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit is the one who breathes into Jesus or he is the power behind Jesus’ miracles. He is also identified as being the Angel Gabriel while it is said that,

Jesus was called “Spirit” because the loins of a lustful man did not contain him, nor does the menstruating womb envelop him.³⁶⁸

Mīr Khvānd reports that *Masīḥ* means ‘a patient’, ‘a person having level soles’, a ‘frequent traveler’, ‘beautiful’ or ‘an agent’ because he heals the sick.³⁶⁹

These widely divergent definitions bear no relationship to the Hebrew meaning of anointed.

The similarity between the names Aaron and ‘Imrān is confusing. Aaron is not the brother of Moses and he is either pious or the most depraved Jew.³⁷⁰ ‘Imrān is not the father of Moses who had lived 1,800 years earlier.³⁷¹ The Jews associate Mary with this most depraved Jew because of her purportedly unchaste behaviour.³⁷²

³⁶⁷ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 167, 168, 176.

³⁶⁸ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 656.

³⁶⁹ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 158-9.

³⁷⁰ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 646.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 622. Typically understood to be 1,450 years.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 646.

6.2 The genealogy and merits of the family of Jesus

Fāqūdh has two daughters named Elizabeth and Ḥannā, who marry Zachariah and ‘Imrān respectively.³⁷³ Zachariah is a sixteenth generation descendant of King David through King Solomon.³⁷⁴ Zachariah is a carpenter married to Elizabeth before he becomes a prophet.³⁷⁵ As high priest,³⁷⁶ he supervises thirty Temple priests, nineteen of whom cast lots to determine who will be in charge of Mary, a gamble won by Zachariah himself³⁷⁷ or Joseph the carpenter.³⁷⁸ The lots that the priests cast are made of iron.³⁷⁹ Zachariah is 92 or 93 or 98 or 120³⁸⁰ or three centuries old³⁸¹ when he petitions Allah properly by standing facing the prayer-niche after the ritual prayer,³⁸² because he might get an effeminate son if he asks improperly:

It has been related in an anecdote: Once someone asked God for a son. God gave him an effeminate son. When he said: “My God, I asked for a son, and You have given me an effeminate son”, a voice came down: “For Our part,

³⁷³*Ibid.*, 622-3.

³⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 622, 633.

³⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 326.

³⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 627.

³⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 625.

³⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 626.

³⁷⁹Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 479.

³⁸⁰Al-Tha‘labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 629.

³⁸¹Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 477, 480.

³⁸²*Ibid.*, 481.

We have granted you a son. But you didn't know the proper way to ask for him.”³⁸³

Just as John is not effeminate, he is not prone to sexual sin as Muhammad points out when he ‘pointed to a speck of earth, took it, and said, “and his penis was the size of this speck.”’³⁸⁴ John the Baptist is a ‘Friend of God’,³⁸⁵ a pious ascetic whose tears so wound his face that he bleeds from the wounds.³⁸⁶ John, who is six months older than Jesus, is now living with Allah because he is a sinless martyr,³⁸⁷ who is not subject to punishment.³⁸⁸

‘Imrān, who is a thirteenth generation descendant of King David³⁸⁹ via King Solomon,³⁹⁰ died while Ḥannā was pregnant.³⁹¹ Ḥannā gives birth to Mary ‘when the sun and the moon were in the right position’.³⁹² Joseph is Mary’s uncle through two lines; he is Mary’s paternal uncle since ‘Imrān and Joseph are grandsons of Mathān³⁹³ and he is also the son of Mary’s maternal aunt.³⁹⁴

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 480.

³⁸⁴ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 629.

³⁸⁵ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 477, 480.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 483.

³⁸⁷ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 628.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 629.

³⁸⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 297.

³⁹⁰ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 623.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 624.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 478.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 626.

³⁹⁴ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 158.

6.3 Nativity narrative

There are several stories of how Mary came to conceive Jesus. While Mary and Joseph work in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre³⁹⁵ or burn incense in the Temple,³⁹⁶ Mary is engaged to a king.³⁹⁷ She, along with Khadija, Fāṭima and the wife of Pharaoh, is among the most exemplary of women.³⁹⁸ Gabriel, who is ‘a beardless young man with a bright face [and] curly hair’, blows into a pocket of Mary’s loose outer garment, which causes her to conceive when she puts it on.³⁹⁹ Gabriel is the spirit, who stretches his hand out toward Mary.⁴⁰⁰ When the spirit Gabriel appears to Mary, she thinks that he wants to have intercourse with her.⁴⁰¹ However, Jesus is actually created from the real ‘water’ of Mary and the imaginary ‘water’ of Gabriel.⁴⁰² After her first period, ‘Gabriel grasped hold of Mary by her collar and blew into her.’⁴⁰³ Mary conceived Jesus without a husband because,

³⁹⁵ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 641. This is the church that Constantine built three centuries after the crucifixion.

³⁹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 209.

³⁹⁷ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 642.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 624.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 639.

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 328.

⁴⁰¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, tr. ‘Aisha ‘Abd al-Rahman, 109; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, tr. Culme-Seymour, 69.

⁴⁰² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, tr. ‘Aisha ‘Abd al-Rahman, 110; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, tr. Culme-Seymour, 70.

⁴⁰³ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 484-5.

As for the pleasure of marriage, the Lord, He is exalted, gave Mary such pleasure in obedience and worship that the pleasure of a husband was of no value by comparison.⁴⁰⁴

Mary leaves the Temple to purify herself from menstruation or to delouse her hair whereupon an angel approaches her⁴⁰⁵ and then Gabriel grabs her hands and blows into her sleeve.⁴⁰⁶ The handsome Gabriel speaks to Mary when she is visiting her sister, who is doing her menstrual ablutions behind a curtain.⁴⁰⁷

Either at the instant of conception⁴⁰⁸ or after one or three hours,⁴⁰⁹ or three days,⁴¹⁰ or six or eight or nine months,⁴¹¹ when Mary is nine⁴¹² or thirteen or fifteen⁴¹³ or twenty, she gives birth to Jesus 'at a place called Bethlehem' 'near the land of Egypt'⁴¹⁴ or in Jerusalem or Ramla or Damascus.⁴¹⁵ Jesus is delivered through Mary's mouth or navel and He is the first baby born three months prematurely who survives.⁴¹⁶ She shields herself with a screen or a wall or the sun shades her.⁴¹⁷

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 480.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 300-1.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁴⁰⁷ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 157.

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 485.

⁴⁰⁹ Al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 642.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 638, 674.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 642.

⁴¹² Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 316.

⁴¹³ Al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 638, 674.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 642.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 647.

⁴¹⁶ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 485.

After Zachariah and Joseph attend the birth of John the Baptist, they hear that Mary has started her labour, so they search for and find Mary and then Jesus speaks to Joseph.⁴¹⁸

Even though Jesus first speaks while Mary is nursing Him,⁴¹⁹ Jesus had responded to Joseph's questioning of Mary's faithfulness while He was in her womb by saying, 'O Joseph, what are these words you speak?'⁴²⁰ Several others also accuse her of fornication. Iblīs charges Zachariah with fornicating with Mary.⁴²¹ Mary's uncle Aaron accuses her of infidelity.⁴²² Al-Rabghūzī mentions that Jesus called on Allah to kill a man who said that Mary was a prostitute.⁴²³ 'The blessed virgin'⁴²⁴ Mary flees from the Temple before giving birth because she fears that the people will kill the baby Jesus.⁴²⁵ When the Jews find Mary, they tear their clothes and throw dust on their heads as they accuse her of fornication.⁴²⁶

Something strikingly similar to the doctrine of Original Sin is stated by Muhammad: 'Every person born is attacked by Satan and is thus prone to [sinful]

⁴¹⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 301.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 330.

⁴¹⁹ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 487.

⁴²⁰ Al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 329.

⁴²¹ Al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 637.

⁴²² Al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 330.

⁴²³ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 392-5.

⁴²⁴ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 168.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

desire, except Mary [and her offspring].⁴²⁷ The fact that Jesus has not been touched by Satan either means that He does not cry or that He is sinless.⁴²⁸ Jesus' name is Hebrew or Syriac.⁴²⁹

Mary leans 'her blessed body' against a tree and Allah makes a fountain of water for Jesus' post-partum ablutions and Allah sends angels with provisions.⁴³⁰ Jesus or Gabriel speaks from beneath Mary⁴³¹ saying that Allah is providing a stream of water and dates because she is sad.⁴³² Three transmitters expound upon the virtues of the dates Allah provided and then the narrative proceeds with Joseph cracking nuts and starting a fire for Mary, which explains why Christians roast chestnuts at Christmas:

That is why Christians light a fire on the night of the Nativity, and play with nuts.⁴³³

Wise men follow a star to give Jesus gold representing His prophethood, myrrh representing His miraculous healings and incense representing Allah raising

⁴²⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 298. This suggests that Jesus' brothers James and Jude are also sinless.

⁴²⁸ Al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 624.

⁴²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 316.

⁴³⁰ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 159.

⁴³¹ Al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 643.

⁴³² Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 304.

⁴³³ Al-Tha'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 643.

Him to heaven.⁴³⁴ Mary and Jesus rest in a cave for 40 days⁴³⁵ then as they flee to

Egypt with the baby Jesus, He speaks with a lion⁴³⁶ and acts as a midwife:

Jesus heard that the wife of the king was having great difficulty in giving birth, as half of the child had emerged and half remained. So Jesus said, “O people, go to the king and inform him that I will place my hand on her womb and she shall be delivered in haste.”⁴³⁷

After Mary and Jesus live in the Temple or Egypt or Damascus,⁴³⁸ Jesus receives the Gospel in Nazareth when He is twelve.⁴³⁹ He starts performing miracles when He is eleven⁴⁴⁰ or seventeen or 27⁴⁴¹ or 30.⁴⁴² Jesus becomes a prophet at the age of 30.⁴⁴³ Jesus learns ten to 30 times faster than other boys⁴⁴⁴ and He memorizes the entire Torah, Books of Wisdom and Gospel.⁴⁴⁵ Jesus is one of only six people (the others being Joshua son of Nūn, Moses, Aaron, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Imām Nātuq b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq) who knows the entire Mosaic law which, according to Rabī’ b. Anas, consists of 40 books, each of which contains 1,000 chapters each of which

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 645.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 645.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁴³⁷ *Al-Kisā’ī*, *Qīṣaṣ*, 331.

⁴³⁸ *Mīr Khvānd*, *Rauzat*, 161.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁴² *Ibn Kathīr*, *Qīṣaṣ*, 306.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴⁴⁴ *Al-Tha’labī*, *Qīṣaṣ*, 653.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 656.

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contains 1,000 verses.⁴⁴⁶ Jesus starts seeking followers at the Temple by proclaiming
the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad,⁴⁴⁷ who will be an
illiterate prophet from the Quraysh tribe in the province of Tihāma, who will be
succeeded by the ‘ulāmā’, rather than by a line of prophets.⁴⁴⁸ Jesus is ‘the most
magnificent of speakers’,⁴⁴⁹ who wears a wool hat and cape, eats oat bread, walks
everywhere, does not like perfumes and does not talk with women.⁴⁵⁰ Jesus is an
ascetic, who wears scratchy clothing made out of hair, eats leaves, goes without a
house or family and,

When the Hour was mentioned to Jesus, he used to scream. It was said: It is
not possible for one to mention the Hour to the son of Mary and keep him
quiet.⁴⁵¹

‘Izrā’īl, the Angel of Death, takes Mary’s life and then Jesus buries her the next
day.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁶ Mīr Khawānd, *Rauzat*, 11.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁵¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 307.

⁴⁵² Al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 489.

6.4 Miracles

The *qışaş* mention the Biblical miracle of Jesus walking on water⁴⁵³ and situate the Biblical miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding feast in Egypt when Jesus was twelve.⁴⁵⁴

The *qışaş* add details to the six Q. 3.49 and 5.110 miracles. Jesus speaks with Mary before He is born and as a baby in order to authenticate His claim to be a prophet.⁴⁵⁵ Jesus' healing of lepers and those born blind baffles physicians;⁴⁵⁶ even more so when He heals 50,000 sick and paralysed each hour.⁴⁵⁷ Among the dead that Jesus raises back to life are Lazarus,⁴⁵⁸ a son of an old woman,⁴⁵⁹ a king's son, a playmate who was killed by another boy,⁴⁶⁰ a daughter of a tithe collector, Noah's son Shem and Ezra.⁴⁶¹ Raising Shem from the dead, when he is 4,000 years old,⁴⁶² convinces the ruler of Nasibin to follow the religion of Jesus.⁴⁶³ There is a riddle in which Jesus raises a man's dead wife and a man in the adjoining grave, then when

⁴⁵³ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 649, 660.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 650.

⁴⁵⁵ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 156.

⁴⁵⁶ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 648, 657, 662.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 653.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 648, 657.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 657-8.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 651-2.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.* 659.

⁴⁶² Al-Kisā'ī, *Qışaş*, 334.

⁴⁶³ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 169.

the wife marries a king who happens to be passing by while her husband is sleeping in her lap, Jesus returns her to the dead because of her ungratefulness.⁴⁶⁴ Jesus tells his boyhood playmates what their parents are doing at home then their parents do not let Him play with their children, so He responds by transforming the parents into swine.⁴⁶⁵ The miracle of turning clay into birds, which was discussed in detail in Chapter 2.5, is mentioned in three of the *qışaṣ* compilations. Mīr Khvānd says that Jesus shapes ‘a piece of loam’ into a bird that is ‘called a bat’.⁴⁶⁶ Al-Tha‘labī adds that the bat is the most perfect bird of all⁴⁶⁷ then al-Rubghūzī gives nine reasons why the bat is the most wondrous bird.⁴⁶⁸

The *qışaṣ* add significant detail to the important *Sūra* 5 miracle of Jesus calling a table down from heaven. The disciples of Jesus ask for the table to come down as a sign that Allah finds their 30 day fast to be acceptable.⁴⁶⁹ Jesus calls the table down while He is travelling in order to convince people that He is a messenger.⁴⁷⁰ Angels⁴⁷¹ slowly⁴⁷² guide the red⁴⁷³ table that is wrapped in cloth⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁶⁴ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaṣ*, 668-9.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 648, 650, 660.

⁴⁶⁶ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 164.

⁴⁶⁷ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaṣ*, 656.

⁴⁶⁸ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaṣ*, 490.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Qışaṣ*, 309.

⁴⁷⁰ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 169.

⁴⁷¹ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaṣ*, 664.

⁴⁷² Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 170.

through clouds⁴⁷⁵ that are both above and below it,⁴⁷⁶ upside down⁴⁷⁷ to the people sitting in a meadow.⁴⁷⁸ This happens intermittently⁴⁷⁹ or each morning and evening⁴⁸⁰ or every morning⁴⁸¹ for three days⁴⁸² or forty mornings.⁴⁸³ After bowing in adoration, Jesus removes the cover from the forty cubits by forty cubits solid gold table⁴⁸⁴

Upon the table are found wild greens,⁴⁸⁵ pomegranates,⁴⁸⁶ dates⁴⁸⁷ and other fruits,⁴⁸⁸ white bread⁴⁸⁹ or five or six or seven flat barley loaves with olives, honey, clarified butter, cheese and sliced dried meats, two or seven fishes with all the

⁴⁷³ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaş*, 666.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Qışaş*, 309-10.

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaş*, 666.

⁴⁷⁶ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 170.

⁴⁷⁷ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaş*, 665.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 665.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 667.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 665.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 667.

⁴⁸² Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş*, 493.

⁴⁸³ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaş*, 667.

⁴⁸⁴ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 170-1. A four inch thick table of this size would contain 23 million ounces of gold.

⁴⁸⁵ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş*, 493.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Qışaş*, 309-10.

⁴⁸⁷ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 170-1.

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qışaş*, 665.

⁴⁸⁹ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş*, 493.

flavours or broiled or with grease and salt and vinegar,⁴⁹⁰ meat and every kind of food except meat or leeks⁴⁹¹ or onions.⁴⁹²

Half a dozen stories give an account of how many people ate the food on the table, but the range from 0 to 7,000 is unhelpfully unreliable; in some cases, the sick are healed by eating at the table.⁴⁹³ In a miracle within the table miracle, Jesus revives a fish to life, but it so startles His disciples that He returns it to the dead.⁴⁹⁴ Allah transforms 330 men who mock this miracle into apes and swine that do not eat, drink or reproduce, but die in three days after 'eating filth in the privies'⁴⁹⁵ or Allah tells Jesus to keep the rich people away from the table and then in other versions, He punishes 400 people who doubt or are ungrateful by turning them into swine⁴⁹⁶ or when nobody embraces the faith, they are all transformed into swine that devour each other.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁰ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 664-6.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 664-6.

⁴⁹² Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 170-1.

⁴⁹³ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 665, 667; Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş*, 493; Ibn Kathīr, *Qışaş*, 309-10.

⁴⁹⁴ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 666-7.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 664, 666, 668, 669.

⁴⁹⁶ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 171.

⁴⁹⁷ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş*, 493.

The *Qışaş* mention several miracles that are not alluded to in the Qur'an or the Holy Bible. When Jesus is thirty, Allah inspires Him⁴⁹⁸ to speak in parables and to exorcise and subdue devils.⁴⁹⁹ He turns pots of water into meat and broth while He turns jars of water into wine.⁵⁰⁰ Although He places clothes into a single vat, each garment comes out of that vat dyed the very colour that His employer had ordered.⁵⁰¹ The vat is filled with indigo dye.⁵⁰² It is because of this miracle that the disciples follow Jesus.⁵⁰³ By just striking the ground with His hand, Jesus produces water and two loaves of bread whenever His disciples so desire.⁵⁰⁴ His final miracle is rising to heaven.⁵⁰⁵

Several miracles are embedded into a tale of lies, treachery and double-crossing that reads like a story from the *1001 Nights*. In this story, Jesus heals a blind man and a crippled man; He then walks on water⁵⁰⁶ and raises a dead king.⁵⁰⁷ He kills and eats an antelope and then restores it to life and He does the same with a

⁴⁹⁸ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 674.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 653.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 651.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 652.

⁵⁰² Al-Rabghūzī, *Qışaş*, 492.

⁵⁰³ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 162.

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 654.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 669.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 661.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 662.

cow.⁵⁰⁸ A sheep is raised to life then returned to the dead in the version told by Mīr Khvānd.⁵⁰⁹ Mīr Khvānd situates the riddle about the blind and cripple thieves in Damascus where torture is used to exact a confession.⁵¹⁰ The *Ta'riḫ* of al-Ṭabarī had situated this riddle in Egypt. He then locates in a Syrian village the miracle just mentioned about turning water into meat, red wine and bread for a king.⁵¹¹

6.5 Judgment Day

Judgment Day begins at sunrise on a Friday.⁵¹² Jesus is a ruddy man whose disheveled hair is not anointed⁵¹³ and along with Idrīs (Enoch), He is alive in heaven.⁵¹⁴ Jesus will descend to the Lydda Gate⁵¹⁵ or the eastern white rock minaret of the Damascus mosque during dawn prayers⁵¹⁶ or to the mosque in Mecca while the people are being led in prayer by the Mahdī who asks Jesus to become the imām of the Muslims.⁵¹⁷ Appearing from al-Ruḥā (Edessa), 'He will descend between two sceptres and will break the cross, slay the pig, establish the head-tax, and make

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 661-2.

⁵⁰⁹ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 173-4.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 161-2.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵¹² *Al-Kisā'ī*, *Qīṣaṣ*, 336.

⁵¹³ *Al-Tha'labī*, *Qīṣaṣ*, 648.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibn Kathīr*, *Qīṣaṣ*, 317.

⁵¹⁷ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 182.

wealth abundant.⁵¹⁸ He marries⁵¹⁹ an Arab woman⁵²⁰ has children, spreads security⁵²¹ and lives for seven⁵²² or forty years⁵²³ when the Angel of Death finds Him reading the Holy Bible in the Temple⁵²⁴ and takes His life.⁵²⁵

6.6 Miscellaneous *qiṣaṣ* about Jesus

Al-Tha‘labī also mentions Jesus within fourteen of his other tales: creation, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Elisha, David, Isaiah, Daniel, the People of the Cave, St. George, and the People of the Trench.⁵²⁶ These tales say that it is Shem that tells Jesus that the ark is 1,200 cubits by 600 cubits,⁵²⁷ that John the Baptist is one of Jesus’ disciples,⁵²⁸ that Jesus commands His disciples to take twenty percent of the booty,⁵²⁹ and that six babies have the ability to speak:

⁵¹⁸Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 675.

⁵¹⁹*Ibid.*, 675.

⁵²⁰Al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 334-5.

⁵²¹Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 675.

⁵²²Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 316.

⁵²³Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 675.

⁵²⁴Al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 334-5.

⁵²⁵Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 675.

⁵²⁶*Ibid.*, 42; 100-1; 134-5, 201; 312; 434; 484; 550; 564 & 573; 691, 698-9 & 708-9; 715; and 732 respectively.

⁵²⁷*Ibid.*, 101.

⁵²⁸*Ibid.*, 564.

⁵²⁹*Ibid.*, 699.

Six spoke in the cradle bearing witness: Joseph the truthful; the son of Māshiṭa, the daughter of Pharaoh; John b. Zachariah; Jesus, son of Mary, the monk friend of Jirjīs; and the one of the Trench.⁵³⁰

There are 430 or 540 or 560 or 600 years between Jesus and Muhammad.⁵³¹ The first

83 verses of *Sūra* 3 were revealed because Christians claim that God has a Son.⁵³²

There are four grades of apostles; apostles, messengers, the *‘ūlu-l-‘aẓm min al-rusul*

and seal of the prophets.⁵³³ There are two, four and six moralistic sayings attributed

to Jesus in the compilations of al-Rabghūzī,⁵³⁴ Mīr Khvānd⁵³⁵ and Ibn Kathīr

respectively.⁵³⁶

6.7 Observations on Jesus as depicted in the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*

The Qur’an was delivered to an audience that was familiar with the Holy

Bible, the Talmud and Haggadic Midrash legends, apocryphal myths, enigmatic

anecdotal popular folklore and oral Arab stories concerning holy men that were

circulating throughout Arabia.⁵³⁷ However, the geographically dispersed audiences

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 730-1.

⁵³¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 317.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 313-4.

⁵³³ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 228-9.

⁵³⁴ Al-Rabghūzī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 392-5.

⁵³⁵ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 176-7.

⁵³⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ*, 307.

⁵³⁷ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext* (NY: Routledge, 2010) states that ‘The Qur’ān...should not be read in conversation with what came after it (*tafsīr*) but with what came before it (Biblical literature)’ (13) because *mufasirun* read their own time specific sectarian positions into the text of the

of the late 'Abbasid Empire were not as familiar with this material, so *qışaş* were often preached by converts from Judaism, because they were the people most familiar with the Biblical prophets. *Qaşāşīyyūn* (storytellers) were itinerant preachers who recited the Qur'an and *qışaş* in mosques and preached 'fire and brimstone' sermons that inspired piety among the masses.⁵³⁸

The numerous compilations of *qışaş* that were assembled all over the Muslim world during the last thousand years into a wide range of languages attests to the popularity of this genre. Al-Tha'labī interweaves tales from fifty *qaşāşīyyūn* into chronological order around the Qur'anic text concerning Jesus, rather than into the Qur'anic order as he does in his *tafsīr*. He presents 'rather imaginative

Qur'ān (22). 'The Qur'ān should be appreciated in light of its conversation with earlier literature, in particular Biblical literature (by which I mean the Bible, apocrypha, and Jewish and Christian Exegital work.' (2) 'The audience must follow the Qur'ān's lead to some subtext' because 'The Qur'ān awakens the audience's memory.' (2). Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context* (NY: Routledge, 2008), 17 states that the Qur'ān should be evaluated as a Late Antique work rather than through the *Sīra* or *tafsīr* and 18 states that virtually all revisionist see the Christian subtext to the Qur'ān, having specifically named Günter Lüling (10), Christoph Luxenborg, Alphonse Mingana, Arthur Jeffrey, Tor Andre, Sidney Griffith, and Georg Graf (15). This work includes several articles that argue that very point including: Samir Kamil Samir, "The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'ān" (141-62), Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'ān" (163-74) and Kevin van Bladel, "The Abrahamic Legend in the Qur'ān 18:83-102" (175-203) which states 'quite strikingly, almost every element of the short Qur'ānic tale finds a more explicit and detailed counterpart in the Syriac *Alexander Legend*'. (181)

⁵³⁸ See Brinner's Introduction p. xi-xvi and xx in al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş* and Thackston's Introduction p. xiii in Al-Kisā'ī, *Qışaş*.

stories of the lives of Jesus and Mary⁵³⁹ in which Jesus is ‘a magician who brought the dead to life,’⁵⁴⁰ so that the Jews refer to Him as a magician, sorcerer,⁵⁴¹ or a sorcerer son of the sorcerer.⁵⁴²

As has been seen in other genres that are compilations, ambiguity arises naturally, which is evident to the compiler who repeatedly states that ‘scholars have disagreed’.⁵⁴³ Confusion is observed surrounding *ḥawāriyyūn*, Gabriel, *masīḥ* and Aaron/‘Imrān. The transmitters struggle with the etymology of these words while ignoring their context; often increasing confusion and arriving at meanings that are so hollow that one wonders why the term was used at all.

Zachariah is the high priest and both his family and that of ‘Imrān descend from the line of King David. Mary is demoted to share her high reputation with Khadija, Fāṭima and the wife of Pharaoh. Confusion surrounds the age, location and means by which she conceived Jesus along with the length of her pregnancy, which orifice is the birth canal, to whom Jesus first spoke and who accused her of adultery.

⁵³⁹ See Brinner’s Introduction p. xxxi in al-Tha‘labī, *Qīṣaṣ*.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

⁵⁴¹ Al-Tha‘labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 660, 662.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 669.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, 628, 642, 654, 656.

Both Jesus and John the Baptist are sinless ascetics. Jesus is the best of speakers who tells parables and exorcises demons. Even though He is repeatedly portrayed as taking on the attributes of angels, His uniqueness is diminished by saying that five other babies spoke. Jesus is said to be only one of six people who know all 40,000,000 verses of the Mosaic Law, while it is common knowledge that the Pentateuch is about the same length as the New Testament and the Qur'an and that the Qur'an contains 6,236 āyas while the Mosaic Law includes 613 commands. It is fair to say that the 613 commands of the Mosaic Law are about as long as the approximately 500 legal āyas in the Qur'an.⁵⁴⁴

The *qiṣaṣ* embellish the Qur'anic miracles; for example, the miracle of Jesus forming bats. Bats are as often associated with rats as with birds, but while they are mammals, they are not rodents. Using loam rather than clay is a bit unusual since loam soil is excellent for farming, but it is not used for pottery because it does not hold its shape. Being nocturnal creatures, bats are sometimes known as *ṭā'ir al-layl* or 'birds of the night'.⁵⁴⁵ They are often associated with evil. More space is dedicated to the table that came down from heaven than all of the other miracles combined, yet there are contradictions about many of the details. It is interesting to observe that certain *qaṣaṣiyyūn* saw fit to mention that meat, leeks and onions

⁵⁴⁴Wael Hallaq, "Law and the Qur'an", *EQ*.

⁵⁴⁵F. Viré, "Waṭwāt," *EI*².

were not on the table. Not only does Jesus raise the dead, but after raising an antelope, a cow, a sheep, a fish, his playmate and a woman who left her husband to marry a king, He returns each of them to the dead. Both Jesus and Allah have the power to transform the Jews into swine.

The *qiṣaṣ* are familiar with the Biblical account of the wise men. There is confusion surrounding the location of His Second Coming, whether it be the mosque in Mecca or the white stone minaret of the Damascus mosque or the Lydda Gate of Ramla or between two sceptres.

Thackston points out that the tales of al-Kisā'ī resemble the apocryphal *The Protoevangelium of James*, *The Arabic Infancy Gospel*, *The Infancy Story of Thomas*, *The Pseudo-Matthew Gospel*, *The Nativity of Mary*, *The Transitus Mariae*, and the *Syriac History of the Blessed Virgin Mary*.⁵⁴⁶ Al-Tha'labī includes a story that reads like *1001 Nights*. Al-Rabghūzī shows a penchant for superstition by positing a 'hidden' way to pray in order to get a heterosexual son and by stating that Ḥannā gave birth to Mary when the sun and moon were properly aligned.

The compilation by al-Tha'labī is the standard of the genre; it is the most extensive and most reasonable depiction of Jesus. The other compilations are later and appear to be abridgments that add some new material. The compilation of al-

⁵⁴⁶Al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 334-5n. 119.

Kisā'ī has a tendency toward the fanciful by reporting that Jesus was born on the same day as John, talked from the womb, talked with a lion and was a midwife while He was just a baby. He displays confusion by portraying Zachariah as a carpenter, Gabriel as the Holy Spirit and having Aaron accuse Mary of adultery. Al-Rabghūzī includes the most unreasonable stories: the lots are made of iron, Zachariah is 300 years old when Elizabeth conceives, Jesus is born at the moment that Mary conceives, and Jesus prays that Allah will kill someone who accuses Mary of adultery. He displays a fascination with sex by talking about an effeminate son, Mary's first period, Jesus talking while nursing and that Mary did not desire the pleasure of sex. Ibn Kathīr distinguishes his compilation through his familiarity with Christianity as he talks about burning incense, Original Sin, the Hebrew origin of Jesus' name, fasting for 30 days, and that Jesus became a prophet and started performing miracles when he was 30. He is the only one to place Jesus at His time in history. Mīr Khvānd displays familiarity with the Bible. He includes reports that concern the Old Testament Temple and the Mosaic Law as well as reports that show affinity with the Gospel's mention of Jesus' travels and public speaking and being from Nazareth. Nonetheless, he confusingly identifies Jesus as the Holy Spirit while poorly identifying what *masīḥ* means and providing an incorrect genealogy.

These *qiṣaṣ* provide the most fleshed-out presentation of the Muslim Jesus of all the sources discussed in this thesis. The genre also includes the widest range of transmitters; al-Tha'labī alone includes stories about Jesus that have been transmitted by over 50 different individuals. There is considerable confusion shown in individual definitions or identity statements and even greater conflict is discovered when comparing stories. While Jesus is portrayed as being only human, He has memorised 40 million verses and appears as angelic in heaven. *Qiṣaṣ* display as much of a fascination with the table that came down from heaven as *ḥadīth* do with the Night Journey. The Qur'an does not provide all the details that the curious mind seeks, so the *qiṣaṣ* dispel some of this uncertainty by providing multiple stories that show no hint of uncertainty so that the uncertainty of the Qur'an is replaced with conflicting and anachronistic absolute certainty.

Chapter 7-A summary of how Jesus is treated in stories that explain the ‘occasions of revelations’ (*Asbāb al-nuzūl*)

One type of *ḥadīth* is a report called an ‘occasion of revelation’ (*sabab al-nuzūl*, pl. *asbāb*) that discusses the occasion in Muhammad’s life when certain āyas came down to him. Although these stories were first transmitted by Muhammad’s seventh-century Companions and Successors, systematic compiling of *asbāb* was not undertaken until the eleventh century by ‘Alī b. Aḥmād al-Wāḥidī, (d. 468/1075), a student of al-Tha‘labī (d. 427/1031) in Nīshāpūr. Not only is the *Asbāb nuzūl al-Qur’ān* of al-Wāḥidī the first comprehensive work of this genre, it remains the most authoritative compilation of *asbāb*.⁵⁴⁷

Al-Wāḥidī says that Q. 3.59, 3.61, 3.68 and 3.79⁵⁴⁸ came down to prepare Muhammad for a meeting with a Christian delegation from Najrān. This statement is corroborated by the *Sīra*, which declares that the first eighty verses of *Sūra* 3, which include one of the two Qur’anic nativity narratives, descended for a discussion with the Najrānī Christian delegation.⁵⁴⁹ As it turns out, this passage does not exclusively concern Christians. Al-Wāḥidī adds that Q. 3.69, 3.72, 3.77, 3.83

⁵⁴⁷Walid A. Saleh, “The Last of the Nishapuri School of Tafsir: Al-Wahidi (d. 468/1076) and His Significance in the History of Qur’anic Exegesis” *JAOS*, 126.2 (2006), 8, 16.

⁵⁴⁸Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, tr. Mokrane Guezzou, ed. Yousef Meri (Amman, Jordan: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), 33-6.

⁵⁴⁹Ibn Ishāq, *Sīrat*, 272.

and 3.90⁵⁵⁰ relate to the Jews. The *asbāb* concerning Q. 2.113 and Q. 2.135 show that there was a dispute between the Christians and the Jews:⁵⁵¹

«The Jews say, ‘The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences. (Q. 2.113)»

and

«They say, ‘Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.’ Say [Prophet], ‘No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God.’ (Q. 2.135)»

The nine *asbāb* concerning *Sūra* 3.59-90 probably refer to the single religious disagreement that took place between the Jewish leaders in Medina along with twelve rabbis from Khaybar and ‘Uraynah on the one side, and a Christian delegation from Najrān that was led by two monks on the other side, over which Muhammad presided as the sole judge and jury.⁵⁵² Five *asbāb* inform us that the Jews do not believe in Jesus, the gospels, the prophethood of Muhammad or the Qur’an and that they object to the change of the *qibla* (direction of prayer).⁵⁵³ The Christians are condemned for drinking wine, eating pork, not acknowledging

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 35-7.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 9.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 7, 9, 32-6, 65.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 9, 35, 37, 79.

Muhammad as a prophet, loving the cross, claiming that Allah has a son and worshipping Jesus.⁵⁵⁴

A few more verses from elsewhere in the Qur'an are part of the discussion about the divinity of Jesus. Q. 4.171-2 came down concerning the Najrānī Christians who claimed that Jesus is the son of Allah:⁵⁵⁵

«People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a 'Trinity'– stop [this], that is better for you– God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust. The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God, nor would the angels who are close to Him. He will gather before Him all those who disdain His worship and are arrogant (Q. 4.171-2)»

Gabriel brought *Sūra* 5.82-6 that relate to the recitation of *Sūra* 3.33-84 to the Negus of Abyssinia. Chapter 4.1 of this thesis has already shown that the *Sīra* interprets the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative as consisting of fifteen polemical attacks against Jesus' divinity. Muhammad challenges the Christians about that belief with:

«If anyone disputes this with you now that you have been given this knowledge, say, 'Come, let us gather our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, and let us pray earnestly and invoke God's rejection on those of us who are lying. (Q. 3.61)»

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-3, 36-7, 111-2.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

The Negus then says that what the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative says about Jesus agrees with what is in the Gospels. He then agrees to pay the *jizya*, rather than to call down a curse upon his contingent for having lied about the divinity of Jesus.⁵⁵⁶

Although not situated in the above dispute, al-Wāḥidī mentions that several other *āyas* came down concerning the same topics. Q. 4.153, 5.59 and 21.101⁵⁵⁷ concern the Jews of Arabia. Q. 4.153 relates to a discussion in which the Jews challenged the prophethood of Muhammad. This is important to remember because the purported denial of the crucifixion occurs later in this very paragraph. Q. 5.59 concerns Jewish objections to the prophethood of Jesus and Q. 2.116 relates to the claims that Jesus and Ezra are divine.⁵⁵⁸ Q. 5.46-7 came down for Christians.⁵⁵⁹

The Angel Gabriel brought Q. 3.190, 6.109-11 and 13.31⁵⁶⁰ because the Quraysh challenged Muhammad to perform a miracle like Jesus' raising of the dead while Q. 93.6⁵⁶¹ came down in response to Muhammad's complaint that he could not raise the dead as Jesus had done. Q. 8.67-9 was revealed when seventy Quraysh

⁵⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 64, 70 and 111-2 respectively.

⁵⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 47, 78-9 and 98-9 respectively.

⁵⁶¹*Ibid.*, 164.

were taken prisoner at the Battle of Badr; at this time, Abū Bakr was likened to

Jesus who said.⁵⁶²

«if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise.(Q. 5.118)».

Allah provides Q. 43.57 to respond to a Qurashī statement that Christians affirm the

divinity of Jesus.⁵⁶³ Q. 46.15 was revealed concerning a caravan trip to Syria taken

by Muhammad and Abū Bakr, when they were twenty and eighteen respectively in

which, when the monk Bahira saw Muhammad sitting under a tree, under which

only Jesus had ever sat, Bahira told Abū Bakr that Muhammad was a prophet.⁵⁶⁴

7.1 Observations on Jesus as depicted in the *asbāb al-nuzūl*

While *asbāb al-nuzūl* are commonly thought to reveal the occasions of revelations, Rippin reports that '[t]he material has been recorded within exegesis not for its historical value but for its exegetical value'.⁵⁶⁵ Not only is it useful for exegesis, but more specifically *asbāb* is largely polemical. Juynboll states that '[o]ne may be struck by the polemical tone of a sizeable proportion of these *asbāb*

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 84-5.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵⁶⁵ Rippin, "Literary Analysis", 153.

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traditions: a remarkably large percentage deals with situations in which the Jews or
Christians are addressed, mostly in hostile terms'.⁵⁶⁶

As in the *Sīra*, the majority of the *Asbāb* of al-Wāḥidī concern *Sūra* 3. Unlike the *Sīra*, the dispute is between the Jews and the Christians, rather than between Christians and Muhammad. Upon closer examination, one discovers that there are actually three disagreements, one between the Christians and the Jews, one between the Christians and Muhammad and one between the Jews and Muhammad. The disagreement between the Christians and the Jews concerns the Jewish unbelief in Jesus and the gospels as well as their objecting to the Christian practice of eating pork. The dispute between the Jews and Muhammad concerns their not believing in Jesus, the gospels, the prophethood of Muhammad or the Qur'an along with their objection to his changing the direction of prayer. Christians are separated from Muhammad because they do not believe that Muhammad is a prophet while they believe that Jesus is divine and because of their practices of drinking wine, eating pork, worshipping Jesus and loving the cross. The differences between Jews and Christians are rather minor in contrast to their disagreements with Muhammad. On everything about which the Jews and

⁵⁶⁶G.H.A. Juynboll, "Ḥadīth and the Qur'ān", *EQ*.

Christians disagree, one party is also at odds with Muhammad. It is therefore a bit incongruous to portray this as a disagreement between the Christians and the Jews.

By the time of al-Wāḥidī, the notion that Islam is the middle way between the two extremes of Judaism and Christianity had taken hold and that idea is reflected in his portrayal of Muhammad as taking the middle road between these two great religious communities in resolving their disagreement. While al-Wāḥidī portrays the disagreement as being between the Jews and the Christians and he shows Muhammad as providing a middle way, the Jews and the Christians understand that their primary disagreements are with Muhammad, not with each other, and that submission to Muhammad, not a middle way, is his agenda.

Four of the seven *āyas* that came down to the Quraysh concerning Jesus pertain to Muhammad's inability to raise the dead as Jesus had miraculously and repeatedly done. While the Christians applaud Jesus' miracles, the Jewish claim that they are sorcery at least acknowledges that something supernatural is happening. These *asbāb* lead to the conclusion that Muhammad's inability to perform miracles with or without the help of Allah makes it difficult to motivate Jews, Christians and Qurashī to submit to him.

Reflections on the works discussed in Part I

While the Qur'an is held to be Allah's speech and Ibn 'Arabī presents his own mystical interpretations, the other thirteen early Arabic primary sources are not as different from each other as they might seem at first. Each of the compilers of *ḥadīth* determined his own principles and rules by which he culled through his vast collection to determine which sayings he would include in his compilation. Some of them discussed their methods in their compilations. Nonetheless, there were no hard and fast rules that determined which stories could be included in the sayings of Muhammad (*ḥadīth*), biography (*sīra*), history (*ta'rīkh*), tales of the prophets (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), occasions of revelations (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) or even exegesis (*tafsīr*) for that matter. Most of these genres include a mixture of *ḥadīth*, story (*khabar*), narrative (*riwāya*), report (*ḥikāya*), tales (*qīṣaṣ*), reports with a single chain of transmitters (*āḥād*), anonymous reports (*qīla*) and stories transmitted by Jews (*Isrā'īliyyāt*). Each of these genres is a compilation of stories. Each genre is organised differently and the topics covered by the stories differ between genres, but nonetheless, the stories are topically arranged compilations that name the original transmitters.

Emphasizing the similarity of these genres, Rippin states that ‘producing entertaining tales was a key to the development of *tafsīr*.’⁵⁶⁷ In several cases, these works include the same story from the same transmitter. For the most part, these works are compilations of reports written in Arabic by Persian scholars, but there are a few exceptions. Ibn Kathīr moved to Damascus where he wrote in Arabic after the Mongols took Persia; Ibn ‘Arabī was an Andalusian; al-Rabghūzī was a Central Asian writing in Turkish; Mīr Khvānd was an Afghanī writing in Persian. Persians wrote the other eleven works in Arabic.

The early parts of the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq⁵⁶⁸ and the first four volumes of the *Ta’rīkh* of al-Ṭabarī ‘belong to the *qīṣaṣ* genre’.⁵⁶⁹ These are the sources for most of the material that was surveyed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. *Asbāb al-nuzūl* literature is a sub-genre of *ḥadīth*, not exactly its own genre, and yet *asbāb* are found in both the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq and in the *Asbāb* compilation of al-Wāḥidī. Some of the stories found in the *Qīṣaṣ* of al-Tha‘labī are also included in his *Tafsīr*. *Isrā’īliyyāt* appear in almost every genre studied here. Superstition, myth and legend are also part of the mix.

⁵⁶⁷ Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr”, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2ed, vol. 13 (New York: Thompson Gale, 2005), 8951.

⁵⁶⁸ See Wheeler’s Introduction p. 7 in *Prophets*.

⁵⁶⁹ See Brinner’s Introduction p. xx in al-Tha‘labī, *Qīṣaṣ*.

The Muslim scholars surveyed in Part I of this thesis are genuinely confused about the meaning of *ḥawāriyyūn*, the identity of the Holy Spirit and Aaron/‘Imrān and about dates, as illustrated in both the wide range of dates for events and by flagrant anachronisms. The Holy Spirit is confused with both the Angel Gabriel and Jesus. Aaron is Mary’s uncle or brother or the son of ‘Imrān or he is ‘Imrān or he is not the brother of Moses. ‘Imrān is a descendant of King David or the son of Māthan or Josiah or he is Mary’s brother or grandfather or he is named after Aaron or he is not the father of Moses or he is pious or depraved.

There is no agreement about simple matters like what foods were on the table that came down from heaven, or which prophets were on which levels of heaven on Muhammad’s Night Journey or to which city Jesus will return at His Second Coming. Variations exist between the *Sūra* 3 and *Sūra* 19 nativity narratives. There is equivocation in how and where Mary conceives Jesus, her age, the length of her pregnancy, the location of Jesus’ birth, to where they flee, how long they live in exile, when and where Jesus commences His ministry.

While confusion must be mentioned, let it not distract from the overall picture. These variations do not trouble Muslims because Islam focuses on its central doctrines, rather than following the tendencies of Judaism and Christianity to focus on doctrines of minor import. Islam has a rather simple creed in which

only two things are affirmed, so it grants considerable leeway to Muslim about what other beliefs they can hold. In contrast to Islam, the Jewish Pharisees of Jesus' time were so afraid of breaking even the most obscure provisions of God's law that they built a hedge around the law and would not cross that stricter hedge of rules.

Together, these fifteen Arabic primary sources have much to say about the Muslim Jesus. They affirm the Annunciation, Immaculate Conception, His Virgin Birth, receipt of gifts from the Wise Men, miracles, Last Supper, Second Coming as judge of all humanity and His victory over the Antichrist. The names of three *Sūras* are closely related to Jesus; 'The Family of 'Imran' and 'Mary', *Sūra* 3 and *Sūra* 19 respectively, present the two nativity narratives and situate Jesus in the line of prophets that descends through 'Imrān while 'The Feast', *Sūra* 5, includes the story of Jesus miraculously calling a table down from heaven, making this His most important Qur'anic miracle. Not only is Jesus found in the line of prophets, the members of His extended family are shown to be quite pious. His maternal grandmother, Ḥannā, dedicates her daughter, Mary, to God upon her conception. The Blessed Virgin Mary works in the Temple under her uncle Zachariah's supervision where she meets her husband, Joseph the carpenter. The Angel Gabriel makes the Annunciation that Mary will have the Immaculate Conception and Virgin Birth of Jesus. Zachariah is a High-Priest and prophet who descends from

the prophets King David and King Solomon. Zachariah's miraculously conceived son, John the Baptist, is a sinless ascetic.

Since the Qur'an does not present a comprehensive portrait of Jesus, the understanding of the Muslim Jesus develops over time as the different genres of primary Arabic sources interact with various aspects of the Qur'anic story. The longest segments in the Qur'an about Jesus are the *Sūra* 3 and *Sūra* 19 nativity narratives. Almost every opportunity is taken to deny the divinity of Jesus; even the very fact of His birth is a testimony that He is not Allah. The most significant contribution that the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq makes is to interpret the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative as an extended polemic against the Christian dogma that Jesus is divine. The *Ta'rikh* of al-Ṭabarī builds upon the Qur'anic data concerning the birth and miracles of Jesus while it also discusses Jesus' time in history. The *Asbāb al-nuzūl* of al-Wāḥidī situates most of the *āyas* about Jesus into a disagreement between the Najrānī Christian delegation and Muhammad. The *qīṣaṣ* offer the most thoroughgoing tales about the life and miracles of Jesus.

The *ḥadīth* present a different aspect of the Muslim Jesus, the heavenly perspective. They place Him there where He validates the prophethood of Muhammad and then returns to earth on His Second Coming as a good Muslim. This is accomplished by reinterpreting Q. 4.159, in which Jesus is a witness in

Heaven against Jews, as meaning that He judges all mankind here on earth after His Second Coming. Because the faithful want to be able to recognize Him, physical descriptions are provided. Since it is argued that He is exclusively human and must be alive for His Second Coming, this reinterpretation provides the necessary reasoning for commentators to deny that Jesus could be raised from the dead even though He had raised the 'divine' Ezra from the dead.

Jesus is a prophet in the genealogical line of righteous Jewish prophets; He is a 15th generation descendant of King David through King Solomon and 'Imrān, just as His cousin, the ascetic prophet John the Baptist, has descended through King David, King Solomon and the high priest and prophet Zachariah. Islam proclaims that it is the middle way between the excesses of the Jewish denial of the prophethood of Jesus and the excesses of the Christian deification of Jesus. The divinity of Jesus is disavowed by showing that He is just like John the Baptist, that He can perform miracles only through the power of the Holy Spirit or Allah, by using His Biblical titles to deny His divinity and by declaring that *Sūra* 3 was revealed as a polemical response to the Christian delegation from Najrān.

The Muslim Jesus performs half as many miracles as are recorded in the Gospel accounts.⁵⁷⁰ Not only does He raise the dead, but He returns four animals

⁵⁷⁰ 21 as opposed to 37.

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and three people to the dead and He turns people into swine. These are the kinds of miracles for which the Jews accuse Him of being a magician and sorcerer.

Comparisons between Jesus and Muhammad are inevitable. As the penultimate Muslim prophet Jesus is the immediate precursor to Muhammad, who is the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*). Jesus has the same mission as all of the other prophets. The Jews reject His mission. *Sūra* 19 was revealed to show the Negus of Abyssinia that Muhammad's Qur'an and Jesus' Gospels are the same. The *ḥadīth* provide half a dozen ways that Muhammad is superior to Jesus. The triumphal Night Journey portrays Muhammad as more important than Jesus because while Jesus acknowledges Muhammad's prophethood from next to the lowest level of Heaven, Muhammad talks with prophets on six higher levels and then negotiates with Allah over the number of daily prayers in the same manner that Abraham negotiated with God on behalf of Lot. The Night Journey likens Muhammad to Enoch and Noah, who walk with God in Heaven, Jacob, who ascends a ladder to heaven, Elijah, who flies to heaven in a chariot of fire, and the Apostle Paul, who ascends to the third heaven. The *mi'rāj* is a powerful missionary (*da'wa*) tool designed to show the superiority of Muhammad.

When it comes to Judgment Day, Muhammad does not live up to his claim to be the most important person. It is Jesus who is all important while Muhammad is

limited to answering intercessory prayer. Jesus is sinless, but the Angel Gabriel purifies Muhammad immediately before his Night Journey. Furthermore, Muhammad is unable to raise the dead as Jesus has done. Jesus is most often shown as returning to the eastern white stone minaret of the Great Mosque of Damascus. He is an ascetic Ṣūfī to whom are attributed several moralistic sayings. Jesus is a prophet (*nabī*) and messenger (*rasūl*) who proclaims the unity (*tawḥīd*) of Allah. He is a Muslim prayer leader (*imām*) who leads prayer (*ṣalāt*), recites the creed (*shahāda*), goes on pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) and circumambulates the Ka'ba. He is a *mujāhid* who leads Muslims in a *jihād* against Gog, Magog, the Antichrist and all non-Muslim religions including Christianity. Jesus is a judge (*qāḍī*) over all mankind, which entails condemning Christians to Hell. Physical descriptions of Jesus are provided so that the faithful can recognize Him at His Second Coming. The portrayal of Jesus as wearing the yellow garments of a *dhimmī* is entirely incongruous and anachronistic with the rest of how He is portrayed on Judgment Day. No explanation is given for why Jesus, not Muhammad, has such honorific roles, especially the ultimate Godly role of judging human behaviour.

There must be at least a hundred clear denials of the divinity of Jesus in the works surveyed in Part I. Nonetheless, the crucifixion or its denial is not stated unequivocally. The various stories that discuss the location of His grave are

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especially out of place in light of the purported Qur'anic denial of His death on the cross.

It is quite relevant to provide the background material about Jesus contained in Part I of this thesis. It helps to give a context to the discussion of His crucifixion in Part II and Part III and to portray Jesus in a rounded way from the Muslim viewpoint. Part I is impressively full of little-known details, disparate, sometimes wildly unlikely, sometimes plausible. These backgrounds demonstrate the gradual evolution of a Muslim picture of Jesus that is an amalgam of material current in the Middle East during late antiquity. This material, common to Jewish, Christian and then Muslim 'folklore', was often embodied in the *Isrā'īliyyāt* or Apocryphal Gospels. This amalgam was assimilated into the Muslim perception of Jesus.

Part II-The received wisdom of the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of medieval Muslim scholarship concerning the crucifixion of Jesus

Q. 4.157 is typically explained as meaning that Allah cast the likeness of Jesus onto someone else so convincingly that the Jews mistakenly crucified that substitute while Allah raised Jesus to Himself. Several different substitution legends are found within *tafāsīr* as well as in other genres of Muslim literature. Substitution legends gained and maintained their near universal acceptance through the *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān* of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923). This commentary was ‘immediately regarded very highly’ and ‘has retained its importance for scholars till the present day’.⁵⁷¹ Therefore, this thesis starts its investigation of medieval Muslim scholarship concerning the crucifixion with that *Commentary*. Chapter 8 discusses a selection of the most interesting stories that al-Ṭabarī presents about the crucifixion. Part I discusses the popularity and diversity of stories concerning Jesus, except for what they say about His crucifixion, that are contained in six genres of Muslim literature including the *Taʾrīkh* of al-Ṭabarī and six *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. The comments that these two genres make about the crucifixion are explored in Chapter 9.

⁵⁷¹ C.E. Bosworth, “al- Ṭabarī, Abū Ḍjafar Muḥammad b. Ḍjarīr b. Yazīd”, *El*².

Chapter 8-The *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)

8.1 Background

The biography of al-Ṭabarī is very well-known to everybody in the field of Islamic studies, while those outside the field can easily access this information online or in books, journal articles or encyclopaedias such as *EI*, *EI*² and *MIC*, so it is not included here. A translation of some of what al-Ṭabarī wrote about the crucifixion of Jesus has been published in an article by Abdelmajid Charfi.⁵⁷² Following is my translation of the most significant comments that al-Ṭabarī makes on Q. 4.157 in his *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*. There are at least four twentieth-century printed editions of his *Ta'wīl*; both Charfi and this thesis utilise the 1373/1954 edition.

8.2 A translation and analysis of the most significant comments that al-Ṭabarī makes on Q. 4.157 in his *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*

Al-Ṭabarī begins by saying that he will now discuss his interpretation of Q. 4.157. He says that the commentators have disagreed in their interpretation of what this verse means and he presents a series of reports of what various commentators have said. The first report goes as follows:

Some of them [the commentators] said:

⁵⁷²Charfi, “Ṭabarī”, 122–5.

Then the Jews surrounded Him and His companions. They surrounded them [Jesus and His companions] without establishing [who] Jesus [precisely was] because they [His companions] were all made to look like Jesus. This made it difficult for those who wanted to kill Jesus [to pick] Him out from the others. One of the people in the house with Jesus came out and they killed him thinking he was Jesus.⁵⁷³

Al-Ṭabarī then mentions a similar report which is as follows:

Ibn Ḥamīd told us, Ya'qūb al-Qumī told us, on the authority of Harūn b. 'Antara, on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih [who] said:

Jesus entered a house, and with Him [were] seventeen of the disciples, and they [the Jews] surrounded them [Jesus and His disciples]. Then, when they [the Jews] went in to see them [Jesus and His disciples], Allāh had [already] fashioned all of them [Jesus' disciples] into the form of Jesus. Then they [the Jews] said to them [Jesus and His disciples]:

You have performed sorcery [against] us!

Show us Jesus or we will kill all of you!

Jesus said to His companions:

Who among you [will] sell his soul today for Paradise?

Then a man among them said:

I will!

Then he [that volunteer] went out to them [the Jews] and said:

I am Jesus.

Allāh had fashioned him into the form of Jesus, so they took him and killed him and crucified him, and for that reason [the following verse was revealed],

«he was made to appear like that [like Jesus] to them».

They thought that they had killed Jesus. The Christians thought likewise, that he was Jesus, but Allāh raised Jesus on that day.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, vol. 9 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif Majara, 1373/1954), 367.

⁵⁷⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'wīl*, 367-8; R. G. Khoury, "Wahb b. Munabbih, Abū 'Abd Allāh," *El'* says that Wahb (d. 110/728), born in 34/654 in Yemen, was an ascetic

Al-Ṭabarī then presents another substitution legend from the same transmitter,

which goes as follows:

Another [version] of this report has been related on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih, and that is [as follows]:

It was told to me by al-Muthannā, [Ibn] Ishāq told us, Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Karīm told us, 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. Ma'qil told us that he heard Wahb [b. Munabbih] saying:

Jesus, the son of Mary, peace be upon Him, when Allāh told Him that He [would] leave this world, He [Jesus] became anxious about death and it grieved Him. He called the disciples, then made food for them, and said:

They [will] fetch me tonight, so I have a request of you.

When they met Him at night, He gave them dinner and began serving them. When they had finished the meal, He began washing their hands and performing their ablutions with His own hand and He began wiping their hands with His garment.⁵⁷⁵

The report then mentions that the disciples were not able to stay awake for prayer during the night. Jesus then predicts that one of His disciples will deny Him three times before the cock crows. The account of Peter's denial of Jesus and another disciple's betrayal of Jesus then follows:

The Jews were searching for Him. They took Simon, one of the disciples, and said:

This is one of His companions!

judge in Ṣan'ā' and Successor known for his familiarity with Biblical material and for transmitting *Isrā'īliyyāt*, a *qīṣāṣ al-anbiyā'* and for writing a no longer extant *tafsīr*; Robinson, "Birds", 5 states that Wahb is known to be a transmitter of *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

⁵⁷⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'wīl*, 368; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol 1, 174n.41 states that 'Abd al-Samad b. Ma'qil, a nephew of Wahb, died in the first decade of the ninth-century.

So he [Simon Peter] disowned [Jesus] and said:

I am not one of His companions!

So they [the Jews] left him [Peter]. Then others seized him [Peter] and he disowned [Jesus to them] as well. Then [Peter] heard the sound of the cock, so he wept and it grieved him.

Then, when a new day began, one of the disciples came to the Jews and said:

What [will] you give me to point you to the Messiah?

They gave him thirty dirhams, so he took them and pointed them [the Jews] to Him [Jesus]. The substitution had taken place before that. They seized him and they made certain [that it was] him. They bound him with rope and began leading him by a halter saying to him:

You revived the dead and scolded Satan and freed the demon possessed and you cannot rescue yourself from this rope?!

and spitting on him and laying thorns on him, until they brought him to the piece of wood on which they wanted to crucify Him, but Allāh raised Him to Him[self] and they crucified the resemblance which had been made for them.⁵⁷⁶

A little later, this report continues with a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus

that starts with Jesus saying:

God raised me up to Himself, and nothing but good has happened to me. Only a likeness was shown to them.⁵⁷⁷

He ordered the disciples to meet Him at such and such a place [Galilee]. Eleven [of His disciples] met Him at that place. He did not find the one who had sold Him and who had pointed the Jews to Him, so he asked His disciples about him and they said:

He repented of what he arranged, then he choked to death and killed himself.

Then, He [Jesus] said:

If he repented, Allāh forgave him!⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾwīl*, 369.

⁵⁷⁷ Translation from al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, IV, 122.

⁵⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾwīl*, 370.

The next five reports mostly repeat what has already been said, shedding no new light on the matter. Then comes a report that was transmitted by Ibn Ḥamīd from Salama on the authority of Ibn Ishāq.⁵⁷⁹ This report names the disciples and then it names Sergius as the disciple who volunteered to be crucified in Jesus' stead as the following narrative shows. Jesus said that the names of His disciples were:

Peter, James the son of Zebedī, John the brother of James, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alpheus, Thaddeus, [Simon the] Cananaean and Yūdas Zakariyyāyūṭā (Judas Iscariot)

Ibn Ḥamīd said, Salama said, Ibn Ishāq said:

Among those mentioned to me was a man named Sergius, (*Sirjis*); there were thirteen men other than Jesus. The Christians deny that he [Sergius] is the one who was a likeness to the Jews in place of Jesus.⁵⁸⁰

After a brief discussion about the number of disciples present, the report continues:

He [Jesus] said:

O community of disciples, which of you [would] like to be my companion in Paradise, on the condition that you are made similar to my form for the people and then killed in my place?

Sergius said:

I will, O spirit of Allāh!

⁵⁷⁹J.M.B. Jones, "Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār b. Kḥiyār", *El*²; Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) lived a generation after the Successors, transmitted 17,000 *ḥadīths*, stories of the prophets and the author of the most authoritative biography of Muḥammad; Robinson, "Birds", 5 states that Ibn Ishāq is known to be a transmitter of *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

⁵⁸⁰Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'wīl*, 372.

He [Jesus] said:

Sit in my seat.

Then, he sat in it. Jesus, may the prayers of Allāh be upon Him, was raised up. Then they entered upon him [Sergius] and took him and crucified him, so he was the one who was crucified and

«he was made to appear like [Jesus] to them».⁵⁸¹

A further discussion about Judas then follows:

Judas repented of what he arranged and then he choked to death with a rope until he killed himself. He is anathema to the Christians, although he had been one of His [Jesus'] few companions.

Some of the Christians maintain that Judas is the one who

«was made to appear like [Jesus] to them»,

so they crucified him and he said:

I am not [the one you want]!

I am the one who pointed you to Him!

Allāh knows what really happened.⁵⁸²

Al-Ṭabarī concludes this lengthy compilation by informing his audience about

which report he finds most acceptable, saying:

My first of these reports is correct, one of the two sayings told to us on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih: the likeness of Jesus was cast upon all who were in the house with Jesus when [the Jews] surrounded Him and them, without them questioning which one was Jesus. But Allāh therefore shamed the Jews, who deceived Him, by rescuing His prophet, peace be upon Him.⁵⁸³

The reason he gives for choosing this report is:

It was said to us that only the first two reports are right, because those [are the people] who saw Jesus among the disciples with their own eyes. If they

⁵⁸¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾwīl*, 372-3.

⁵⁸² Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾwīl*, 373; the phrase 'I am not your friend (*ṣāḥabakum*)' echoes Peter's statement and seems to fit the context better when it is translated as 'the one you want' here.

⁵⁸³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾwīl*, 374.

were on the same spot [where] Jesus had been raised and His likeness had been cast upon whom His likeness had been cast, they [would] have seen [Jesus] with their own eyes while He was rising from between them, and they [would have] pinpointed [the one] upon whom His likeness had been cast with their own eyes. They saw him changing into His form.⁵⁸⁴

8.3 Observations

Between an introduction and a conclusion, in which his own opinions are expressed, al-Ṭabarī places eleven *ḥadīths* which give different stories of the events leading up to the crucifixion. As one of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, al-Ṭabarī strives to include all known *ḥadīths* that are relevant to this topic, even if some *ḥadīth* conflict with others; he follows the same practice in his *History*. One feature that makes compilations distinctive is their encyclopaedic nature, by virtue of which they almost necessarily include conflicting stories. Nonetheless, our knowledge of Muslim scholarship benefits because many of these early *ḥadīths* are now found only in the compilation of al-Ṭabarī.⁵⁸⁵

Rippin points out that al-Ṭabarī also reported conflicting *asbāb* concerning other verses.⁵⁸⁶ Wheeler holds that this diversity of interpretations enriches the possible ways in which the Qur'an may be understood and applied to life.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'wīl*, 374.

⁵⁸⁵ See Wheeler's Introduction p. 6 in *Prophets*.

⁵⁸⁶ Andrew Rippin, "The Function of Asbāb al-Nuzūl in Qur'ānic Exegesis", *The Qur'an and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001), XV: 39,

⁵⁸⁷ See Wheeler's Introduction p. 13 in *Prophets*.

Al-Ṭabarī shows that medieval Muslim scholars were familiar with the Gospel accounts by his time. They report the events at the Last Supper, Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. It is noteworthy that there are only two instances of Peter's denial of Jesus mentioned in this text. Almost immediately after Wahb explains that a substitute died in place of Jesus, he reports a post-resurrection appearance in which Jesus tells His disciples to meet Him at Galilee. This report is very much at odds with the explanation that Allah raised Jesus to Himself. This story necessitates Allah raising Jesus to heaven, Jesus returning to earth to talk with His disciples, Jesus returning to heaven and then Jesus returning for his 'second' Second Coming. Right after Ibn Ishāq properly identifies Jesus' twelve disciples, he names Sergius as the disciple who volunteered to be crucified in place of Jesus and he mentions that the Christians do not agree with this story.

While the *Taʾwīl* of al-Ṭabarī names Sergius as the disciple who volunteered to die in place of Jesus and his *Taʾrīkh* says that a Roman king released Sergius (see 9.1.2), neither Ibn Ishāq nor the Gospels name Sergius as a disciple. The name Sergius does not seem to appear in the literature until some 500 years after the time of Jesus and this Sergius is a Roman soldier who converts to Christianity for which he is martyred and venerated, particularly in Arabia. A shrine to this Sergius

at Rusāfat al-Shā'm was visited by Arab nomads.⁵⁸⁸ One of the earliest inscriptions of Syriac words in Arabic letters is found on a lintel over the door of the martyrion of this St. Sergius in Zebed in Syria is dated to 512AD.⁵⁸⁹ Alain George states that Choricus wrote about the domed octagonal church of St. Sergius at Gaza that was built before 536AD.⁵⁹⁰ Cyril Mango says that Choricus was 'staggered by the variety of spectacle' which included a glorious octagonal roof, a cross atop a marble column, a mosaic wall depicting the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus and two dozen lavish paintings depicting the Annunciation, Jesus' birth in a stable,

⁵⁸⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, IV, 124n. 321; Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley, UC Press, 1999) states that St. Sergius was executed in Rusafa (1) on the upper Euphrates (4) where his cult started with the construction of a church in 431 (7) that became a popular pilgrimage site (5) attracting a following even more widespread than St. George (4). Muslims participated in the cult of St. Sergius (9, 179) following the example of the Umayyad Caliph Hisham who was personally devoted to St. Sergius (181) and not only had a summer palace at Rusafa (175), but connected the mosque with its martyrion (177) as did his grandson 'Abd al-Rahman in Cordoba (175). St Sergius is sometimes identified as the Muslim prophet Khidr especially in Armenia (90).

⁵⁸⁹ Enno Littmann, *Semitic Inscriptions* (NY: Century Co., 1904), 12, 44, 47-8, 56, pages 6, 8, 23 and 53 say that professor Sachau discovered Syriac words inscribed in Syriac, Greek and Arabic in 1879; <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/zebed.html>.

⁵⁹⁰ Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Saqi, 2010), 84-5, 98 and 182n. 90.

Jesus surrounded by the Old Testament prophets, the Last Supper and betrayal, and a host of Jesus' miracles.⁵⁹¹

Neal Robinson states that al-Kindī (d. 259/873) mentioned that a Nestorian monk named Sergius was the source of Muhammad's information on Christianity,⁵⁹² but he contradicts that by saying that that particular Sergius 'seems to be entirely a figment of their imagination'.⁵⁹³ Mango and Scott mention a Sergius who was the bishop of Constantinople during the reign of Heraclius (r. 610-41).⁵⁹⁴ Catholic Encyclopedia mentions a Pope St. Sergius (d. 701). Mark N. Swanson writes that the Nestorian Catholicos Timothy I (d. 823) sent the report of his discussion with the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Mahdī (d. 168/785) to a priest by the name of Sargīs around 790.⁵⁹⁵ So, it can be seen that there were several historical figures by the name of Sergius around Arabia during and before the time of Ibn Ishāq.

Al-Ṭabarī does not explain the meaning of Q. 4.157 in relationship to its context within the sentence, paragraph, *sūra* or the Qur'an, but rather he cites eleven *ḥadīths* that originate outside the Qur'an. None of these *ḥadīths* is a *ḥadīth al-*

⁵⁹¹ Cyril Mango, *The Art of The Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 55, 60-8.

⁵⁹² Robinson, "Perspectives", 94, 96.

⁵⁹³ Robinson, *Christ*, 23.

⁵⁹⁴ C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 464.

⁵⁹⁵ Swanson, "Folly to the *Ḥunafā'*: The Crucifixion", 248.

qudsī (sacred speech) that was originally the speech of Allah. Al-Ṭabarī completed his *Ta'wīl* about the same time as the canonical *ḥadīth* compilations were completed and 'he read it to his students in the year 270'/[883].⁵⁹⁶ Yet, none of these *ḥadīths* are found in the canonical *ṣaḥīḥ* compilations of *ḥadīth*. These *ḥadīths* had either been rejected by or were unknown to his contemporaries, al-Bukharī and Muslim. Furthermore, these *ḥadīths* are not in the *Muwatta'* of al-Malik, the *sunan* of Abū Dā'ūd or the *Mishkāt* of al-Tibrīzī. Although *isnāds* are provided, they do not generally include enough transmitters to span the 250 years between Muhammad's death and the writing of his *Ta'wīl*. Three of the reports were transmitted by Successors rather than by Companions and although Sa'īd, Qatāda b. Di'āma, and Mujāhid b. Jabr studied under Ibn 'Abbās, the latter is not named as the initial transmitter of these *ḥadīths*, even though al-Ṭabarī names him elsewhere.

Conflicting *ḥadīths* cannot all be true, but there is no consensus about how to weed the weak ones out of the stronger ones; that is left to the discretion of each commentator. Al-Ṭabarī does not reconcile the *ḥadīths* that contradict one another, but rather he states his personal preference for one of the two *ḥadīths* transmitted by Wahb, who is a Successor known to be a transmitter of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, which have long been regarded as unreliable by Sunni scholars. Al-Ṭabarī prefers Wahb despite

⁵⁹⁶Charfi, "Ṭabarī", 105n. 2.

the fact that no court or jury would tolerate any witness who provided two contradictory testimonies. While the favourite *ḥadīth* of al-Ṭabarī states that the likeness of Jesus had been cast upon all seventeen disciples of Jesus, no other Muslim commentator prefers this *ḥadīth*. The favourite *ḥadīth* of al-Ṭabarī is from the *Isrā'iliyyāt* and is transmitted by a Successor with a single line of just three other transmitters (*āḥād*) that no other *mufassir* (commentator) prefers.

The substitution legends of al-Ṭabarī along with several others are reported by the scholars in Part III as well as by many other *mufassirūn*. There are many more problems with substitution legends that warrant discussion, but since several of these problems are discussed by the medieval Muslim scholars in Part III, they speak for themselves first and then a summary of the problems with substitution legends appears in Chapter 17.

Chapter 9-How the crucifixion and ascension of Jesus is portrayed in the *Ta'rikh* of al-Ṭabarī and in the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*

9.1 The *Ta'rikh* of al-Ṭabarī

9.1.1 Background

The *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* of al-Ṭabarī is the earliest extant comprehensive Muslim world history. Chapter 5 discusses what the *Ta'rikh* says about the time in history in which Jesus appeared, His birth, miracles, oaths sworn in His name and letters based on a verse near the end of the *Sūra* 3 nativity narrative. What the *Ta'rikh* has to say about His crucifixion is summarised below.

9.1.2 Summary of the material in the *Ta'rikh* concerning the crucifixion

Al-Ṭabarī provides several reports that mention the raising of Jesus. One report says that:

[H]e was thirty years old. Then inspiration came upon him at the age of thirty. His prophethood lasted three years, and then God raised him unto Himself.⁵⁹⁷

Another report places Allah's raising of Jesus as happening 40 years before Titus' sacking of Jerusalem.⁵⁹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī also mentions:

When Jesus was raised up (i.e., in his Ascension to Heaven), he was thirty-two years and six months old, and his period of prophethood was thirty

⁵⁹⁷Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, various translators (Albany: SUNY, 1985-99), IV, 118.

⁵⁹⁸*Ibid.*, IV, 99.

months. God raised him [to Heaven] corporeally, and he is still alive at this moment.⁵⁹⁹

The raising of Jesus is also mention by al-Ḥasan, the grandson of Muhammad, when he eulogises his father's death with a *khuṭba* in which he elevates 'Alī by saying that Gabriel and Michael were at his right and left hand during his battles and by noting that the night of his assassination is special:

Tonight you have killed a man on a night [of the year] in which the Qur'ān came down, a night in which Jesus the son of Mary was taken up, and a night in which Joshua the son of Nun, the champion of Moses, was killed. By God, none of those who were before him are ahead of him.⁶⁰⁰

Muhammad gives the term of Jesus' ministry along with a prediction of the end of his own ministry when he addresses Fāṭima saying:

(Gabriel) has reviewed the Qur'ān with me once a year, but this year he has reviewed it with me twice, and I fancy that my time has come...Whenever a prophet has been sent, his mission has lasted for a period of half his predecessor's lifetime, Jesus was sent for a period of forty years, and I was sent for twenty.⁶⁰¹

Although these reports provide a range of dates, they give a reasonably accurate timeline for Jesus' ministry and rising.

Al-Ṭabarī includes half a dozen reports about Jesus' crucifixion together in volume IV of his *Ta'riḫh*. The first report in the *Ta'riḫh* is the same as the second

⁵⁹⁹*Ibid.*, V, 414-5.

⁶⁰⁰*Ibid.*, XVII, 232. The last sentence means that none of those who died before 'Alī are any more important than he is.

⁶⁰¹*Ibid.*, VI, 61.

report from Wahb in the *Ta'wīl*.⁶⁰² Next appear four reports transmitted on the authority of Ibn Ishāq, whom al-Ṭabarī refers to as an impeccable authority, that do not appear in the *Ta'wīl*. The first one states that:

God allowed Jesus, the son of Mary, to die at three o'clock in the day [3pm in the afternoon]; then He raised Him unto Himself.⁶⁰³

The second one purports to give a Christian viewpoint:

The Christians assert that God granted him death for seven hours of the day.⁶⁰⁴

These first two reports are consistent with the report that Constantine 'asserted they [the Jews] had slain Jesus'.⁶⁰⁵ The second report proceeds to say that:

God raised Jesus unto Himself, gave him wings of an angel and dressed him in radiance. No longer did Jesus relish food or drink; he was flying along with the angels, around the throne. He was (both) human and angelic, celestial and terrestrial.⁶⁰⁶

The third report concerns some Persians who interpret a South Arabian inscription on 'a huge grave with two huge stone slabs over it' on a mountain named al-Jammā' in 'Aqīq near Medina as reading 'This is the tomb of Jesus, son of Mary, God's messenger to the people of his land.'⁶⁰⁷ The fourth report on the authority of Ibn Ishāq speaks about an idolatrous Roman king who heard that the Jews had killed a

⁶⁰²*Ibid.*, IV, 120-2.

⁶⁰³*Ibid.*, IV, 122.

⁶⁰⁴*Ibid.*, IV, 122.

⁶⁰⁵*Ibid.*, IV, 98.

⁶⁰⁶*Ibid.*, IV, 122-3

⁶⁰⁷*Ibid.*, IV, 123-4.

miracle-working messenger of Allah, so he interviewed the disciples of Jesus, embraced their faith, preserved and honoured the True Cross and released Sergius.⁶⁰⁸ Lastly, al-Ṭabarī mentions that some unnamed historians say that during the reign of the younger Herod, a Joshua b. Pandera was made to look like Jesus and crucified in his place.⁶⁰⁹

9.1.3 Observations

The report that likens Jesus unto a radiant angel is observed in a report from Qatāda that appears both in the *tafsīr* of al-Tha‘labī that is discussed in Chapter 10.3.2 and in the *tafsīr* of al-Baqlī that is discussed in Chapter 15.2.2. Similar stories are recorded by Ibn Ishāq, al-Rāzī according to Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272),⁶¹⁰ and Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī (d. 1130/1718).⁶¹¹

A couple of issues arise in these stories. The statement that Jesus was raised on the same night of the year as ‘Alī died and that the Qur’an descended is problematic. The day before Passover in 29AD is 14 Nisan 3789 of the Jewish calendar,⁶¹² or 12 Rajab 612 years before the Hijra,⁶¹³ which is about eleven weeks

⁶⁰⁸*Ibid.*, IV, 124.

⁶⁰⁹*Ibid.*, IV, 125.

⁶¹⁰Cumming, *Did Jesus Die*, 13, 19, 22.

⁶¹¹Ayoub, “Christology, II”, 99, 122.

⁶¹²<http://www.hebcal.com/converter/?hd=15&hm=Nisan&hy=3789&h2g=Convert+Hebrew+to+Gregorian+date>

before the Night of Power. 'Alī died on 27 January 661⁶¹⁴ or 15 Dhu'l-Hijja 42⁶¹⁵ about eleven weeks after the Night of Power. Both dates are eleven weeks away from Jesus' crucifixion and five months apart from each other.

Some ambiguity concerning the purported Qur'anic denial of the crucifixion enters mainstream Muslim thought from the *Ta'riḫ* of al-Ṭabarī. The existence of a grave presumes a death, so identifying a grave at al-Jammā' in 'Aqīq near Medina as Jesus' is problematic. 'Aqīq is a valley proceeding north from Mecca toward Medina.⁶¹⁶ Since Jewish custom requires burial within a day of death, it is not likely that Jesus was buried 800 miles south of Jerusalem. There is a low probability that the Sabaean script appears on a gravestone 500 miles north of Ṣan'ā'. It is even less likely that a Persian could read Sabaean than could an Arab.

One of the substitutes who al-Ṭabarī names in his commentary, Sergius, is named here, but here he is not a substitute; the substitute is a Joshua b. Pandera, who is not named in his commentary. In Latin, Pandera is a feminine name, so it is unlikely that a son would issue forth from a relationship between two women. While Sergius is named as a substitute in the *Ta'wīl* of al-Ṭabarī, he says that a

⁶¹³ http://www.islamicfinder.org/dateConversion.php/dateConversion.php?mode=ger-hij&day=15&month=4&year=29&date_result=1

⁶¹⁴ *Elr.*

⁶¹⁵ <http://www.oriold.uzh.ch/static/hegira.html>

⁶¹⁶ G. Rentz, 'al-^cAḳīḳ', *Elr.*

Roman king converted to Christianity and released Sergius. It is more likely that Sergius died in 303AD during the Diocletian persecutions and that Constantine's purported vision and conversion occurred in 312AD.

9.2 *Qışaş al-anbiyā'*

9.2.1 Background

The *qışaş* compilations contain the most complete stories of the life of Jesus of any of the different genres of Muslim literature. Their treatment of personal identity, Jesus' identity, Jesus' nativity narrative, the miracles of Jesus and His role on Judgment Day are discussed in chapter 6. Following is a summary of the material found in the *qışaş* about the crucifixion that is not found in the *Ta'rikh* or *Ta'wīl* of al-Ṭabarī.

9.2.2 Summary of the material in the *qışaş* collections concerning the crucifixion

Al-Tha'labī reports that Jesus commands His disciples to pray, but they sleep.⁶¹⁷ When Jesus is led to the cross, the earth darkens. Angels protect Jesus by raising Him to heaven from the mountain⁶¹⁸ or the Temple.⁶¹⁹ His likeness is cast upon Pilate,⁶²⁰ the guard⁶²¹ or Ashyū' b. Qandayrā.⁶²² The miracle of Jesus raising

⁶¹⁷ Al-Tha'labī, *Qışaş*, 670.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 671.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 674.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, 669.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 671.

Ezra from the dead is explained by saying that '[T]he Earth does not consume the bodies of the prophets'.⁶²³

Ibn Kathīr reports that Jesus serves His disciples the Last Supper in order to make them His equals and that Judas betrays Jesus in the morning.⁶²⁴

Mīr Khvānd reports that the Jews imprison Jesus in a cave then a cloud draws Jesus through the roof of the cave to heaven⁶²⁵ and angels take Him to heaven when the sun is eclipsed⁶²⁶ at the third hour.⁶²⁷ Jesus returns to commission His disciples and then He returns to heaven where He dies again and is raised to life again after three hours whereupon He loses His human nature and becomes angelic.⁶²⁸ This happens when He is forty-two even though everyone else in heaven is thirty-three.⁶²⁹ The man that the Jews send to get Jesus out of the cave is transformed into His likeness then they hang him instead or Jesus asks for a volunteer from among the eighteen disciples who are in a house with Him⁶³⁰ and

⁶²²*Ibid.*, 672. This is probably a different transliteration of the same Joshua b. Pandera who is mentioned in the *Ta'riḫ* of al-Ṭabarī.

⁶²³*Ibid.*, 659.

⁶²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 315.

⁶²⁵ Mīr Khvānd, *Rauzat*, 181.

⁶²⁶*Ibid.*, 180.

⁶²⁷*Ibid.*, 182.

⁶²⁸*Ibid.*, 182.

⁶²⁹*Ibid.*, 178.

⁶³⁰*Ibid.*, 181.

Sarhus [Sergius?] volunteers to be crucified.⁶³¹ Jesus is buried in ‘Ā’isha’s

sepulchre⁶³² or next to Muhammad⁶³³ or Abū Bakr⁶³⁴ or ‘Umar.⁶³⁵

9.2.3 Observations of what the *qiṣaṣ* say about the crucifixion

The *qiṣaṣ* add equivocation to the Muslim understanding of Jesus’

crucifixion by mentioning an unnamed guard, Judas, Ashyū’ b. Qandayrā, Joshua b.

Pandera, Pilate and Sarhus as people who had been crucified in place of Jesus. They

also mention that Jesus may have been buried in ‘Ā’isha’s house or sepulchre or

next to Moses or ‘Umar or Abū Bakr or Muhammad or in Muhammad’s grave or at

al-Jammā’ in ‘Aqiq near Madina or in the Farādīs cemetery outside Damascus.

Wahb’s report that implies two Second Comings is made explicit by Mīr Khvānd.

The repeated reference to the grave of Jesus implies that He is dead, but the

statement by Ibn Kathīr that “[T]he Earth does not consume the bodies of the

prophets’,⁶³⁶ implies that Jesus could have died on the cross then been raised for

His Second Coming at the appropriate time.

⁶³¹*Ibid.*, 182.

⁶³²*Ibid.*, 183.

⁶³³Al-Tha‘labī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 676; Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 317.

⁶³⁴Al-Kisā’ī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 334-5; Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 317.

⁶³⁵Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ*, 317.

⁶³⁶*Ibid.*, 659.

9.3 Observations of what the *Ta'riḫ* and the *qiṣaṣ* say about the crucifixion

Both the *Ta'riḫ* of al-Ṭabarī and the compilations of *qiṣaṣ* contain enough ambiguity to open the door to the possibility that Muslim tradition allows for the crucifixion of Jesus. The repeated mention of the location of the grave of Jesus implies that He did actually die. Mentioning that the crucifixion happened at 3pm and that Jesus remains dead for seven hours both introduce the possibility of a genuine crucifixion.

Reflections on the works discussed in Part II

The *Ta'wīl* of al-Ṭabarī includes eleven *ḥadīths*, one of which is also found in his *Ta'rikh*. The *Ta'rikh* includes six *ḥadīths*, one of which is also found in his *Ta'wīl*.

While both genres are considered to be exhaustive and encyclopaedic compilations, neither includes all of the pertinent *ḥadīth* that al-Ṭabarī had assembled. The quality of *ḥadīths* is questionable at best; the favorite *ḥadīth* of al-Ṭabarī concerning the crucifixion is an *āḥād Isrā'īlīyyāt*. Both works refer to a Sergius anachronistically, but in different roles.

While the *Ta'wīl* of al-Ṭabarī consistently denies the crucifixion, both his *Ta'rikh* and the collections of *qīṣaṣ* equivocate on the matter. Both the *Ta'rikh* and the *qīṣaṣ* mention the grave of Jesus, which does not conform to the idea that He was raised alive to Allah in paradise. Just the opposite of a denial is the *ḥadīth* that says that Jesus was crucified at 3pm or the one that says that Jesus remains dead for seven hours. These *ḥadīth* open the possibility that the Muslim Jesus was crucified.

Part III-Medieval Muslim scholarship concerning the crucifixion of Jesus: the minority report

Substitution legends continue to hold great sway over Muslims to this day, but they are not the only way that Muslim scholars explain the crucifixion of Jesus. Ayoub was the first to point out diverse approaches and nuanced interpretations within medieval Muslim scholarship,⁶³⁷ but it was not until the last few years that a book on the subject became available. In *The Crucifixion and the Qur'ān: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, Todd Lawson describes how over forty Muslim scholars interpret the crucifixion of Jesus.⁶³⁸ *The Muslim World* journal published my review that focuses on the Muslim scholars whom Lawson identified as not holding substitutionist views.⁶³⁹ Part III focuses on those scholars.⁶⁴⁰

The eight chapters in Part III study the wide spectrum of medieval Muslim scholars (including two anonymous Muslim works), who explore eight distinct lines of reasoning concerning the crucifixion of Jesus other than the received wisdom of substitution legends. These chapters are arranged in the chronological order of the first scholar to pursue each of these eight lines of reasoning. Each

⁶³⁷ Ayoub, “Christology, II”.

⁶³⁸ Lawson, 6.

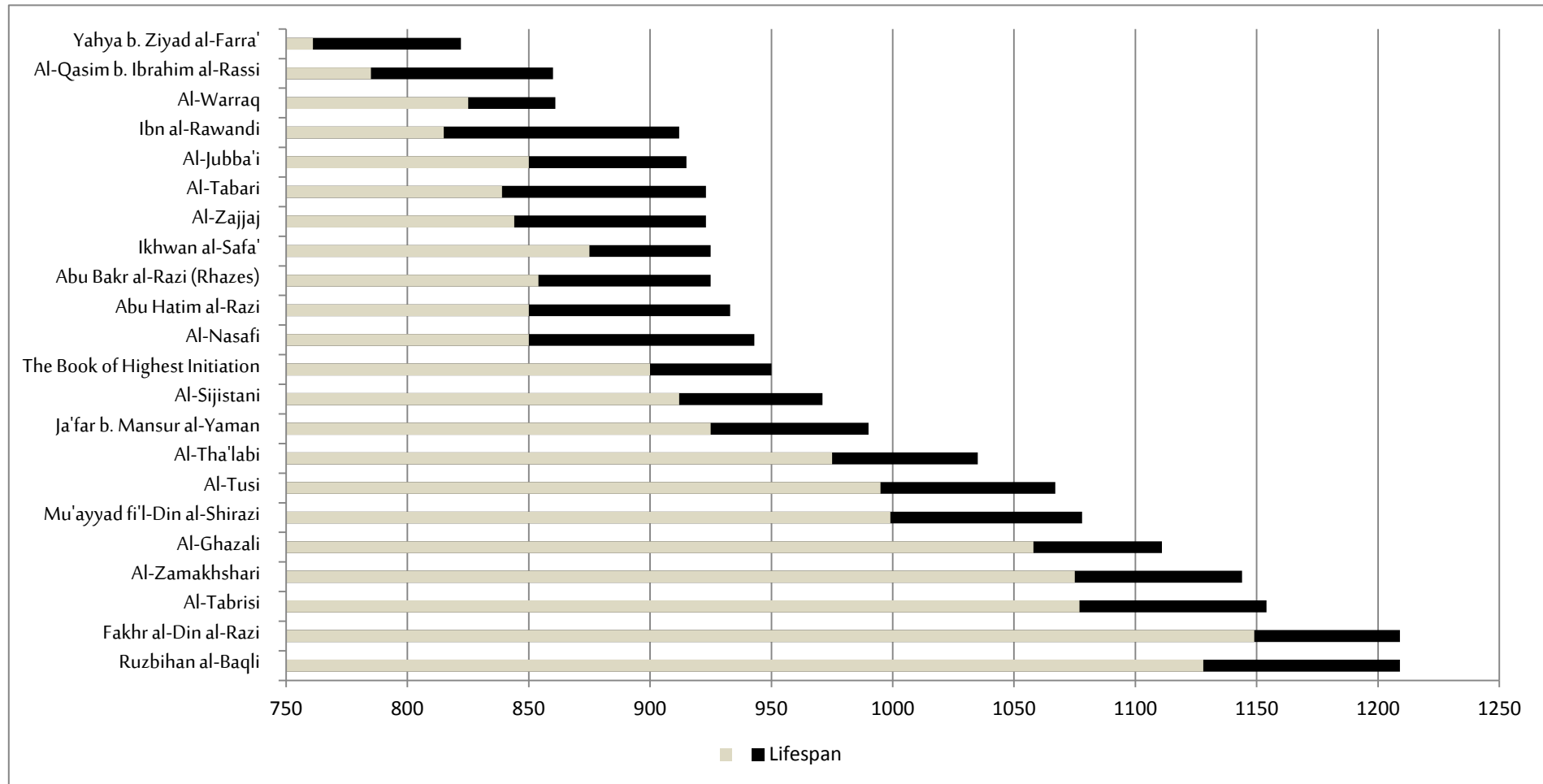
⁶³⁹ Oakes, Review of “The Crucifixion”, 119-21.

⁶⁴⁰ The translations from Arabic in Part III are my own, unless it is stated otherwise.

chapter starts with a prologue that explains a particular line of reasoning and names the medieval Muslim scholars who explore that approach. The scholars in each chapter are arranged in chronological order. Except for the most famous scholars, a brief biography is first given for each of the scholars in order to establish their importance. Next is my translation of parts of the relevant Arabic text along with any necessary analysis. The last heading under each scholar is entitled Observations. This includes an analysis of his work and interaction with Lawson and or other scholars. A discussion of all of the scholars considered in each chapter appears at the end of each chapter. Chapter 17-Concluding reflections-is an evaluation of what all of these scholars have said about the crucifixion of Jesus.

With the exception of al-Farrā', these scholars lived between the 260/874 departure of the Twelfth Shī'ī Imām and the 617/1220 arrival of Ghengis Khan. The following timeline provides an overview of when these scholars lived.

Figure 1 Medieval Muslim scholars timeline



Chapter 10-Who is the *hu* in *qatalūhu*? (207/823-427/1035)

Views about the role that grammar plays in exegesis differ sharply. For example, Rippin argues that:

Pride of place in the tools used in the interpretive process has been given to grammar (including elements of lexicography and orthography).⁶⁴¹

On the other hand, Gilliot argues that:

The jurists, theologians and exegetes, however, did not want the text of the Qur'an to be subject to grammar, since, for them, the only sure science was one derived from the ḥadīth.⁶⁴²

Explaining the meaning of any text based on the lexical meanings of the words and on their grammatical relationships is a more traditional and more widely accepted method than explaining its meaning through extraneous means, such as ḥadīths.

Among the four *mufasssīrūn* who employed grammar to explain Q. 4.157, three of them discussed the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix, *hu*, which is attached to the verb *qatalū* that is negated with *mā* in both of its appearances in this verse. Since the Arabic pronoun *hu* can be either masculine or neuter, *hu* can be translated as 'he' or as 'it'. Since the referent of the pronoun *hu* in Q. 4.157 is not clear, this phrase could be translated as either 'they did not kill him' or 'they did

⁶⁴¹ A. Rippin, "Tafsīr", *El*².

⁶⁴² C. Gilliot, "Exegesis in the Qur'ān" *EQ*.

not kill it'. Less obvious alternatives are also explored by three medieval Muslim grammarians.

Since few English speakers would recognize Joseph Priestley (d. 1804) as an eminent English grammarian, very few modern English-speaking scholars would know the names of famous Arabic grammarians or what makes them important. Therefore, the biographies of the three Arabic grammarians discussed in this chapter are given here.

10.1 Al-Farrā' (d. 207/823)

10.1.1 Background

In 144/761, Abū Zakariyyā' Yaḥyā b. Ziyād b. 'Abd Allāh b. Manẓūr al-Aslamī al-Daylamī al-Kūfī al-Farrā' (d. 207/823) was born into a family that had moved from Daylam to Kūfa. Because of his precise grammatical skills, he acquired the *laqab* (nickname) al-Farrā', meaning the 'skinner' of words. Al-Farrā' excelled in tests of his grammar, philosophy, jurisprudence, astronomy, medicine, history and poetry skills soon after moving to Baghdad. He then became a tutor to the two sons of the caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 197/813-218/833), who also patronised his scholarship. While Ibn Khallikān points out that he 'had a leaning toward the doctrine of the Motazelites', 'he had no desire' to study it. *Kalām* (polemics) was growing in importance during the lifetime of al-Farrā' so that only ten years after he died on his way to the *ḥajj*, it had become essential for state officials to affirm Mu'tazilī doctrines, because the Caliph al-Ma'mūn established the *miḥna* (inquisition).⁶⁴³

Among his dozen grammatical works consisting of over 3,000 leaves are books on dialectical expressions, nouns of action, duals and plurals, full stops and rare expressions.⁶⁴⁴ He is the only early Kūfan grammarian whose manuscripts

⁶⁴³ Ibn Kh., deSl., VI, 63-4, 67-8; R. Blachère, "al-Farrā'," *El*².

⁶⁴⁴ *Fihrist*, 147; Ibn Kh., deSl., IV, 68.

remain extant.⁶⁴⁵ He founded his Kūfan School of grammar on the principle of incorporating and systematising what he had heard in his personal conversations with the Bedouin. However, it should be noted that he consulted Bedouin who passed through Kūfa during his own lifetime and that he did not use the Arabic of seventh-century Bedouin visiting Mecca, who had spoken the Qurashī dialect two centuries earlier and 800 miles away.⁶⁴⁶

Al-Farrā' wrote a book about grammatical inflections entitled *al-Ḥudūd*, which earned him credit for preserving 'pure' classical Arabic and distinguishing it from the colloquial. Ibn Khallikān states that the *Kitāb al-ma'ānī* of al-Farra' explains rhetorical terms found in the Qur'an and that his *Mushkil* explains Qur'anic 'expressions of doubtful import'. He compliments al-Farrā' saying that he 'was the most eminent of all the doctors of Kūfa and also the most distinguished by his knowledge of grammar, philology and the various branches of literature'.⁶⁴⁷

While most of his works have been lost, his commentary entitled *Ma'ānī 'l-Qur'ān*, which is an important example of lexicographical and syntactical exegesis,

⁶⁴⁵ Andrew Rippin, "Studying Early *tafsīr* Texts," in *The Qur'an and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001), V, 313.

⁶⁴⁶ Blachère, "al- Farrā'," *El²*; Andrew Rippin, "Ibn 'Abbās's al-Lughāt fī'l-Qur'ān" in *The Qur'an and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001), XIII, 21, 25 says that the *Lughāt* that has incorrectly been attributed to Ibn 'Abbās includes entries from twenty-nine dialects.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibn Kh., deSl., IV, 63-4, 67.

particularly of ambiguous (*mutashābih*) passages, remains extant.⁶⁴⁸ Gilliot states that this earliest extant *tafsīr* played a ‘decisive’ role in the development of exegesis.⁶⁴⁹ It also defines the role of grammar relative to *ḥadīth* because it focuses on difficult points of grammar.⁶⁵⁰ Ibn Khallikān comments about the thousand-leaf commentary of al-Farrā’ that ‘nothing like it had ever been composed before, and no person can possibly add to it.’⁶⁵¹ Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Abu’l-‘Abbās [Tha’lab] said ‘No one previous to him was his equal and I don’t suppose anybody will surpass him.’⁶⁵² The relevant comments that al-Farrā’ makes in his *Ma’ānī-l-Qur’ān* concerning Q. 3.54, Q. 3.55 and Q. 4.157 are translated and analysed here.

10.1.2 Translation and analysis of the comments that al-Farrā’ makes on Q. 3.54 in his *Ma’ānī-l-Qur’ān*

10.1.2.1 Translation

The meaning of His saying:

«The [disbelievers] schemed but God also schemed (Q. 3.54)»

This was revealed about the affair of Jesus--when they [the Jews] wanted to kill Him. He [Jesus] entered a house in which [there] was a skylight. Allāh, may He be blessed and glorified, helped Him by Gabriel, may the prayer and peace of Allāh be upon Him, and He raised Him [Jesus] to heaven from the skylight. A man from amongst them went into Him to kill Him. So, Allāh cast onto that man the image of Jesus son of Mary. Then, when he entered the house and did not find Jesus in it, he went out to them saying:

⁶⁴⁸Blachère, “al- Farrā’,” *El²; Anth.* 584.

⁶⁴⁹Claude Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’an: Classical and Medieval,” *EQ; Claude Gilliot, “Scholarship and Scholars,” MIC*, 701.

⁶⁵⁰Walid Salih, “Scriptural Exegesis, Islamic,” *MIC*, 707; Rippin, “Tafsir”, 8952.

⁶⁵¹Ibn Kh., deSl., IV, 65.

⁶⁵²*Fihrist*, 146.

There is nobody in the house.
 Then they killed him, thinking that he was Jesus, so that His saying:
 «They schemed and Allāh schemed»
 [means that] the scheming (*al-makar*) of Allāh is persuasion, not according
 to the scheming (*makar*) of mankind.⁶⁵³

10.1.2.2 Analysis

The ‘they’ in verse 54 refers back to ‘the Children of Israel’ (Q. 3.49), who did not believe (Q. 3.52). The language that al-Farrā’ uses, ‘He revealed this concerning the affair of Jesus’ (*nazala hādhā fī shā’n ‘Īsā*), predates the use of the term *sabab* by al-Ṭabarī and the appearance of works of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) by al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1075).⁶⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the intention of al-Farrā’ is to explain that this verse concerns the time when the Jews wanted to kill Jesus.

The ‘scheming’ of Allah is then explained here by means of a substitution legend. Al-Farrā’ is careful to point out that Allah’s scheming is persuasion rather than a negative reflection of His character. However, *makr* can be translated with the morally negative and decidedly culpable term of dishonesty, ‘deception’.

10.1.3 Translation and analysis of the comments that al-Farrā’ makes on Q. 3.55 in his *Ma’ānī-l-Qur’ān*

10.1.3.1 Translation

His saying:

⁶⁵³ Abū Zakariyyā’ Yaḥyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā’, *Ma’ānī-l-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf Najātī and Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Najjār, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Surūr, 1408/1988), 218.

⁶⁵⁴ Andrew Rippin, “The Exegetical Genre *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*: A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey,” *The Qur’an and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001), XVII: 14-15.

«Allah said, 'Jesus, I will cause you to die (*mutawaffika*) and raise you up to Me... (Q. 3.55)»

It is said:

This is a beginning and an end. The meaning in it is: I will raise You up to Me and I will purify You from those who do not believe and I will cause You to die after I cause You to descend to the world. This is a viewpoint. The debate has no beginning and no end.

10.1.3.2 Analysis

An *inclusion* is formed by 'This is a beginning and an end' and 'the debate has no beginning and no end'. In the next obscure passage, al-Farrā' attempts to define *mutawaffika*, arguing that, in the case of Jesus, it does not mean that Allah caused Him to die, but rather that it means that Allah took Jesus back to Himself without Jesus dying. In order to substantiate his interpretation, al-Farrā' goes first to the active meaning of form V of the verb *wafā*, *tawaffā*, which means to exact fully (the payment of a debt). He then proposes that *mutawaffika* implies that Allah will take Jesus and raise Him to His presence without dying (*min ghayri mawtin*). His intention of defining 'death' as 'not death', in the special case of Jesus, is to put an end to this never-ending debate.

In both Q. 3.54 and Q. 3.55, al-Farrā' explains that Allah rescued Jesus from death through crucifixion by raising Him to Heaven. Here, he explains that Jesus will die after His Second Coming. This interpretation is the result of transposing the logical and grammatical order of the verbs *mutawaffika* and *rāfi'uka*, and of

defining *mutawaffika* as ‘taken’ rather than as ‘died’. Every other instance of this root in the Qur’an means ‘died’.⁶⁵⁵

10.1.4 Translation and analysis of the comments that al-Farrā’ makes on Q. 4.157 in his *Ma’ānī-l-Qur’ān*

10.1.4.1 Translation

[In] His saying:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him...»,

[the] *hu* is here for Jesus, may the prayer and peace of Allāh be upon Him.

[Then, in] His saying,

«they certainly did not kill him»,

[the] *hu* is here for knowledge, just as you say ‘I knew it thoroughly’ (*qataluhu ‘ilmān*) and ‘I knew it certainly’ (*qataluhu yaqīnān*).⁶⁵⁶

10.1.4.2 Analysis

The Arabic term *qatalūhu* appears twice in Q. 4.157. Al-Farrā’ holds to the grammatical principle that the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix *hu* affixed to *qatalū* refers to the previous noun of the same gender and number. He explains that the first *hu* refers to ‘Jesus’ because it immediately follows the mention of Jesus. He then explains that the second *hu* refers to ‘knowledge’ because it closely follows the word ‘knowledge’. While this second phrase is usually translated along the lines of:

«they certainly did not kill him»,

his explanation that:

⁶⁵⁵ A.H. Matthias Zahniser, “The Forms of Tawaffā in the Qur’ān: A Contribution to Christian-Muslim Dialog,” *MW* 79:1 (1989), 22.

⁶⁵⁶ Al-Farrā’, *Ma’ānī-l-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Surūr, 1408/1988), 294.

they certainly did not know it,
is seen in English translations by Maulvi Muhammad Ali (1917), Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya (1947) and Maulawi Sher 'Alī (1955). Al-Farrā' does not obtain this meaning from elsewhere in the Qur'an or in *ḥadīth al-qudsī* or from *ḥadīth*, but rather this interpretation results from his understanding of Arabic grammar.

10.1.5 Observations

While substitution legends are reported to have been transmitted from an earlier period, those manuscripts are no longer available, so the exegesis of al-Farrā' provides the earliest extant substitution legend. Al-Farrā' also provides the earliest extant grammatical explanation of these verses.

Lawson incorrectly explains the significance of the interpretation by al-Farrā' as follows:

At 4:157, al-Farrā' is concerned only to say that the pronominal suffix *hā'* ending the verbal cluster *mā qatalūhu* (the HIM of THEY DID NOT KILL HIM) refers to KNOWLEDGE rather than to Jesus 'as when one says: "I knew it perfectly (*qataltu 'ilman*)" and it means "I knew it certainly".⁶⁵⁷ [Lawson's emphasis]

While Lawson correctly states that al-Farrā' says that one third person masculine singular pronominal suffix *hu* refers to 'knowledge', he fails to mention that, in the immediately preceding line of the Arabic text, al-Farrā' clearly explains that the

⁶⁵⁷Lawson, 64.

other third person masculine singular pronominal suffix *hu* in this verse refers to 'Jesus'. He incorrectly states that 'I knew it perfectly' and 'I knew it certainly' is the meaning of 'they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him', when in fact, that is the meaning of the latter clause, 'they certainly did not kill him'. Al-Farrā' states that the *hu* in 'they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him' refers to Jesus. This mistake leads Lawson to confusingly and incorrectly use a double negative in order to state that the Qur'an does not deny the crucifixion of Jesus:

[A]l-Farrā' also explicitly indicates that it is not Jesus whom the Qur'an is saying was not killed.⁶⁵⁸

However, al-Farrā' uses a substitution legend to explain Q. 3.54; he explains that Q. 3.55 means that Jesus was 'taken' from the cross, then 'raised' to Allāh, then returned to earth and then He will die; and he explains that the first occurrence of *qatalūhu* in Q. 4.157 refers to Jesus. These three denials of the crucifixion of Jesus by al-Farrā' are quite the opposite of the explanation offered by Lawson. Al Farrā' is an important commentator who plays a decisive role in the development of exegesis and in defining the role of grammar relative to *ḥadīth*, but not for the reasons given by Lawson.

⁶⁵⁸Lawson, 64.

10.2 Al-Zajjāj (d. 311/ 923)

10.2.1 Background

Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. al-Sarī b. Sahl (d. 310/922) was born in 230/844 and acquired the *laqab* al-Zajjāj because he had been a glass-grinder. He became wealthy because of his relationship with the *wazīr* ‘Ubayd Allāh b. Sulaymān b. Wahb (288/901). He lived a century after al-Farrā’ and he died in the same year and same city as al-Ṭabarī. While al-Farrā’ had founded the Kūfan school of grammar on the basis of the way in which the Bedouin used the language, al-Zajjāj synthesised Baṣran grammar, Kūfan grammar and Greek logic in order to form Baghdādī grammar. Like the Baṣran grammarians, al-Zajjāj argued that rules of grammar had to be based on an authoritative closed corpus, thus closing the Qur’an to change. This happened at the same time that jurists were arguing for a closing of *ijtihād* (independent judgment).

Al-Zajjāj was also one of the first scholars to develop methods of teaching Arabic grammar. His eleven works include books on figurative Qur’anic expressions, etymology, versification, grammar, the relationship between the first and fourth verb forms, noun declension, logic, Muslim sects, and a philology of the

Qur'an entitled *Ma'ānī-l-Qur'ān*, which is so important that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī cited it more than 500 times in his commentary.⁶⁵⁹

10.2.2 Translation and analysis of the comments in the *Ma'ānī-l-Qur'ān* on Q.4.157 by al-Zajjāj

Al-Zajjāj starts his comments about Q. 4.157 with:

His saying:

«And [they] said, 'We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.'»

Namely, [the] verse in [which] they killed [Him] by their own admission:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them»⁶⁶⁰

Thereafter follows this substitution legend:

It was mentioned in the *tafsīr* that when Almighty Allāh, praise be to Him, wanted to raise Jesus to Himself and cleanse Him from them [the Jews], He [Jesus] asked His disciples:

Which of you [will] agree to have my image cast upon him then be killed and crucified and enter Paradise?

Then a man amongst them said:

I [do]!

So, His [Jesus'] image was cast upon him, then he was killed, and Allāh raised Jesus to Himself. All this is not impossible because we do not doubt that it was made to appear like that to them (*shubbiha lahum*).

His saying:

«those that disagreed about Him are full of doubt»

⁶⁵⁹Ibn Kh., deSl., I, 28-9; *Fihrist*, 133; *Anth.* 600; Michael G. Carter, "Grammar and Grammarians," *MIC*, 300; C.H.M. Versteegh, "al-Zaḍḍjādī, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī," *El*²; C.E. Bosworth, "Wahb, Banū," *El*²; Lawson includes a translation of a relevant portion of al-Zajjāj.

⁶⁶⁰Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. al-Sarī al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān wa i'rābuhu*, Part 2 (Beirut: 'Ālam al-kutub, 1408/1988), 128.

Namely, those who disagreed about His killing are filled with uncertainty, because some of them maintained that He was a god and was not killed, and some of them reported that He was killed and they are filled with uncertainty about that,

«with no knowledge to follow, only supposition»⁶⁶¹

Following the substitution legend is a very obscure passage that explains that some scholars have followed the unusual practice of interpreting the Qur'an by resorting to the sayings of pre-Islamic Arabs and poets and that this method is not among the most important methods of interpretation. Al-Zajjāj then starts his own grammatical explanation of the second occurrence of the pronomial suffix *hu* in this verse:

The Glorious Almighty [Allāh] said:

«they certainly did not kill him»

Some of them say:

The *hā'* is for knowledge.

The meaning is:

They did not know it with certainty. (*mā qatalū 'ilmahum yaqīnan*)

It is like saying:

I know the thing thoroughly. (*anā aqталu al-shay' ilman*)

To me, its interpretation is:

I know knowledge completely (*a'lamahu 'ilman tāmman*).⁶⁶²

The Arabic word *qatala*, which usually means 'kill' can mean 'know' when followed by '*ilman*'. Concerning its second appearance in this verse, the grammarian says that the particle *hā'* refers to knowledge ('*ilm*'). This gives al-Zajjāj the ability to

⁶⁶¹*Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁶²*Ibid.*, 128-129.

place its meaning into that second register. He does so by providing three rather synonymous phrases. He then proceeds to say that the pronomial suffix *hā'* attached to the first *qatalū* refers to Jesus.

Some of them say:

«They did not kill him.»

The *hā'* is for Jesus as [Allāh] said:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him»

Both readings are permissible.⁶⁶³

Thus, the first *mā qatalūhu* means 'They did not kill Him' and the second means 'they did not know it with certainty', thus making a pun or double entendre out of *qatalūhu*.

Most commentators address the crucifixion of Jesus at Q. 4.157 or 3.55. Al-Zajjāj comments about Jesus' crucifixion at both Q. 4.157 and at Q. 30.1-3, the latter of which is unusual. *Sūra* 30 is entitled *Rūm* meaning the Byzantines. The first three verses mention their recent loss of Jerusalem to the Persians in 614 and their recapture of the holy city in 7/629. This is a somewhat surprising place to comment on the crucifixion that happened precisely six centuries earlier. Nonetheless, al-Zajjāj provides another substitution legend here:

And it also says in the *tafsīr* that Allāh deceived them in the affair of Jesus, peace and prayers be upon Him. He was in a house in which a man entered to kill Him. Jesus was raised from the house and the man emerged in His

⁶⁶³*Ibid.*, 129.

likeness. They knew well that He was not in the house, then they killed him.⁶⁶⁴

10.2.3 Observations

Al-Zajjāj presents a substitution legend in which Jesus finds a volunteer among His followers. The confusion that follows is because one group maintained that Jesus could not be killed because He was God and another group reported that He had been killed, although they were really uncertain. Al-Zajjāj then discusses the different grammar in the two instances of *hā'* in this verse, saying that the first occurrence refers to Jesus and the second appearance refers to knowledge. In his analysis of Q. 30.1-3, a typical substitution legend that entails deception on the part of Allah is provided.

Lawson states that al-Zajjāj 'offers some interesting alternative and innovative approaches to the understanding of this verse, specifically a concern with grammar, something we have not seen previously'.⁶⁶⁵ Although al-Zajjāj uses grammatical explanations, nonetheless it is not his grammar that prevails in his interpretation of Q. 4.157; it is substitution legends. In his explanation of Q. 4.157, he portrays Jesus as obtaining a volunteer to be crucified instead of Himself, while in Q. 30.1-3 Allah deceives the Jews by transforming one of the disciples of Jesus as

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Part 1, 419.

⁶⁶⁵ Lawson, 73.

He raises Jesus. No effort is made by al-Zajjāj to reconcile these contradictory substitution legends.

10.3 Al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035)

10.3.1 Background

Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Abū Ishāq al-Nīsābūrī al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035) was a Karrāmī from Nīshāpūr, a densely-populated prosperous Silk Road city that was home to adherents of the Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī *madhhabs*.⁶⁶⁶ Nīshāpūr was also the centre of the Karrāmiyya sect that was accused of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) by both the Mu'tazilīs and the Ash'arīs; they were called *mushabbihūn* while the ambiguous verses in the Qur'an are known as *mutashābihāt*.⁶⁶⁷ Both of these terms derive from the same Arabic root from which the difficult phrase *shubbiha lahum* in Q. 4.157 derives.

Al-Tha'labī was most famous for his *'Arā'is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, which serves as a standard and authoritative source for stories about pre-Islamic prophets. He relied heavily on some of the same Jewish sources as well as Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and al-Kalbī (d. 146/763), for both his *Qīṣaṣ* and his *al-Kashf wa'l-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁶ A. Rippin, "al-Ṭhalabī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Abū Ishāq al-Nīsābūrī," *EI*²; Honigmann, "Nīshāpūr," *EI*².

⁶⁶⁷ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'an in the Theology of Al-Qāsim Ibn Ibrāhīm* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 3, 6, 9.

⁶⁶⁸ Rippin, "al-Ṭhalabī," *EI*²; *Anth.* 599; Jeffrey, "Prophet Story", 560; dates from *Anth.* 599; W. Atallah, "al-Kalbī," *EI*².

Al-Tha‘labī combined the Ṣūfī exegetical model of al-Sulamī of Nīshāpūr (d. 412/1021) with philology, *ḥadīth* and legal exegesis.⁶⁶⁹ His competence as a philologist is demonstrated through his composition of *Fiqh al-lughā*.⁶⁷⁰ He is so competent with *ḥadīth* that Saleh argues that the *Tafsīr* of al-Tha‘labī is the epitome of encyclopaedic *tafāsīr* because he also collected *ḥadīth* from Shī‘ī and Ṣūfī sources, he included the *ḥadīth* used by al-Ṭabarī from alternative sources and he included the *ḥadīth* that had appeared during the century and a half after al-Ṭabarī had written his *Ta‘wīl*.⁶⁷¹ Al-Tha‘labī cited so many *ḥadīths* from so many different sources that he decided not to mention *isnāds*.⁶⁷² A translation and analysis of the comments that al-Tha‘labī makes in his *al-Kashf* on Q. 4.157 follow.

10.3.2 A translation and analysis of the comments of al-Tha‘labī on Q. 4.157

«And [the Jews] said, ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ (They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him...)»

Al-Kalbī from Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn ‘Abbās: Jesus, peace be upon him, met a group of Jews and they said:

[You are] the licentious son of the licentious woman and [you are] the hypocritical son of the hypocritical woman,

⁶⁶⁹ Alexander D. Knysh, “Ṣūfism and the Qur’ān,” *EQ*.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibn Kh., deSl., II, 130.

⁶⁷¹ Walid Saleh, “Scriptural Exegesis, Islamic,” *MIC*, 708.

⁶⁷² Saleh, “Exegesis,” 708.

then they slandered Him and His mother. When Jesus heard that, He invoked [Allāh] against them and said:

O Allāh! You are my Lord and I am your servant from a spirit you breathed into existence. I am not accused of [something I have done of] my own accord.⁶⁷³ O Allah! Cursed be those who slandered me and my mother.⁶⁷⁴

Allāh answered His prayer and transformed those who had slandered Him and His mother into pigs. When the chief of the Jews saw what happened to their commander,⁶⁷⁵ he was alarmed by that [because] he had already been afraid of His [Jesus'] message. The Jewish authorities agreed to kill Jesus, then they gathered around Jesus and then they began to ask Him [for an explanation], so He said to them:

You have committed blasphemy and Allāh hates you.

Then they became violently furious about what He had said and they rose up against Him to kill Him, so the Most-High Allāh sent Gabriel. [Allāh] made him (Gabriel) enter a skylight, which is a hole in its roof, then He (Gabriel) led Him (Jesus) up to heaven from that hole. Judah (*Yahūdā*), the chief of the Jews, ordered a man from among his companions called Ṭiṭyānūs⁶⁷⁶ to enter the skylight and kill Him (Jesus). When Ṭiṭyānūs entered the skylight, he did not see Jesus inside it, [but] they thought that he (Ṭiṭyānūs) was fighting Him (Jesus) there. The Most-High Allāh put the likeness of Jesus on him (Ṭiṭyānūs), so when he came out, it was thought

⁶⁷³ This implies that Jesus is saying here that the Jews are deliberately making false accusations against Him and that is why He is invoking a curse against them.

⁶⁷⁴ Footnote 5 mentions *Tafsīr majma' al-bayān* 4.444. The first report in the *Majma' al-bayān li'ulūm al-Qur'ān* of Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabrīsī is this same report transmitted on the sole authority of Ibn 'Abbās, but from vol. 3 (Cairo, 1380/1960), 271.

⁶⁷⁵ He was one of the Jewish leaders who had slandered Jesus and His mother and then had been turned into a pig by Allah in response to the prayer of Jesus.

⁶⁷⁶ Ṭiṭyānūs might be an attempt to Arabise a Greek transliteration of the name of Tatian the Assyrian (d. 180AD) who wrote a harmony of the gospels in Syriac entitled the *Diatessaron*.

that he (Ṭiṭyānūs) was Jesus, so they killed him and crucified him (Ṭiṭyānūs).⁶⁷⁷

Al-Kalbī (d. 67/686) was easily discredited in the eyes of the Sunnis because he ‘fought under the’caliph ‘Alī ‘in the Battle of the Camel (36/656)’.⁶⁷⁸ Al-Kalbī is not to be confused with his son Ibn al-Kalbī (d/ 146/763-4)⁶⁷⁹ to whom is attributed a *Tafsīr al-Kalbī*, which is now known to be a late third or early fourth century work.⁶⁸⁰ Ayoub states that al-Kalbī ‘has been rejected by commentators’.⁶⁸¹ Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687-8) was one of the greatest Qur’anic scholars among the Companions; his works were compiled into a *tafsīr* by one of his students.⁶⁸² Nonetheless, al-Shafi‘ī proclaimed, ‘No more than a hundred of those *ḥadīth* on *tafsīr* attributed to Ibn ‘Abbas may be regarded as sound’.⁶⁸³

This is one of several substitution legends that show the Jews accusing Mary of adultery and in this case, Jesus appeals to Allah who turns the Jews into pigs. While Q. 19.27-31 and Q. 3.46 portray Jesus defending Mary from infancy, this story

⁶⁷⁷ Al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa’l-bayān ‘an tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Beirut, Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī, 1424/2002), 409.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibn Kh., deSl., III, 28.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibn Kh., deSl., III, 28.

⁶⁸⁰ Rippin, “Studying”, 320.

⁶⁸¹ Mahmoub M. Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters*, vol. 1, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 28.

⁶⁸² Vaglieri L. Veccia, “‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās,” *EI*².

⁶⁸³ Ayoub, *Interpreters* I, 28; C. Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān,” *EQ*; G.H.A. Joynboll, “Ḥadīth and the Qur’ān,” *EQ*.

conflates His birth and death so that His defence of the accusations against Mary leads directly to the attempted crucifixion. Allah, however, sends Gabriel to raise Jesus through a skylight and he takes Him up to heaven. Rather than entering the house through a door or a window, the chief priest orders ʾIṣṭyānūs to go through the very skylight from which Jesus has just escaped undetected and then Allah casts Jesus' image upon ʾIṣṭyānūs who the Jews mistakenly capture, kill and crucify.

Muqātil [said]: The Jews placed over Jesus a guard [who] walked with Him wherever he walked, so Jesus climbed the mountain. An angel arrived then took His underarms and raised Him to heaven, then the Most-High Allāh imposed the likeness of Jesus on the guard, so when they saw him, they thought that he (the guard) was Jesus, so they killed him and crucified him (the guard). He (the guard) was saying:

I am not Jesus; I am so-and-so, son of so-and-so (someone they knew).

They did not believe him, so they killed him (the guard).⁶⁸⁴

Muqātil (d. 150/767-8)⁶⁸⁵ is a Shāfi'ī Traditionist⁶⁸⁶ and the scholar to whom the three earliest *tafāsīr* to come down to us are attributed; one elaborates on Qur'anic stories, one organises them by legal topic and one does a word study through cross references.⁶⁸⁷ The *tafāsīr* of Muqātil are the first to establish the

⁶⁸⁴ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, 409-10.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibn Kh., deSl., III, 411.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibn Kh., deSl., III, 409.

⁶⁸⁷ M. Plessner, "Muqātil b. Sulaymān b. Bashīr al-Azdī al-Khurāsānī al-Balkhī," *Et*.²

practice of commenting on every verse.⁶⁸⁸ In spite of Muqātil being the ‘author of a celebrated commentary’,⁶⁸⁹ Ibn Ḥanbal said ‘I should not like to cite anything on his authority’. Abū Ḥātim said ‘[h]is Traditions are to be rejected’, and others said ‘he was apt to make mistakes’, ‘his veracity is suspect’, he was ‘an audacious liar’, he was among the ‘[l]iars notorious for forging Traditions and passing them off as coming from the Prophet’, and ‘all Traditions given by him should be rejected’.⁶⁹⁰ Plessner attributes this to his poor *isnāds* and frequent Biblical references.⁶⁹¹

The story attributed to Muqātil appears to take place outdoors. An angel, presumably Gabriel, snatches Jesus under His arms from among a crowd that had encircled Him and then Jesus escapes to a mountain, not to Paradise. The Jews then mistakenly killed and crucified ‘the guard’ despite his protestations that they had mistaken him for Jesus. Although Lawson states that ‘it is more than a little disappointing that we find nothing unique in his commentary on the particular verses in question’, it should be pointed out that the phrase ‘I am not Jesus, but I am so-and-so,’ was unique until it was repeated by Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī almost two centuries later.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁸Salih, “Scriptural Exegesis,” *MIC*, 706.

⁶⁸⁹Ibn Kh., *deSl.*, III, 409.

⁶⁹⁰Ibn Kh., *deSl.*, III, 410.

⁶⁹¹Plessner, “Muqātil”.

⁶⁹²Lawson, 91.

Al-Saddī⁶⁹³ said: They confined Jesus twice in a house, then a man amongst them [a Jew] entered upon them [Jesus and his disciples]. The Most-High Allāh imposed the likeness (*shabah*) of Jesus upon him [the Jew who had entered the house]. He raised Jesus to heaven from a skylight in the house. Then they [the Jews] entered it (the house) and they killed him [the man who had been] with Jesus.⁶⁹⁴

This brief and rudimentary story places Jesus and His disciples in a house which a Jew enters. The Jew is then transformed into the image of Jesus so that when the other Jews enter the house, after Jesus rises to heaven through a skylight, they kill their Jewish companion.

Qatāda [said]: It was mentioned to us that the prophet of Allāh, Jesus, son of Mary, said to His disciples:

Upon whomever My likeness (*shabah*) is cast, then truly, he will be killed.

Then a man amongst the group said:

It is I, O prophet of Allāh.

Then the man was made to resemble (*shabbaha*) [Jesus]. The Most-High Allāh protected Jesus and raised Him to Him. So when Allāh raised Him, He attired Him in feathers and dressed Him in light. He [Jesus] put aside His desire for food and drink and He appeared with the angels encircling the throne and he was human-angelic-heavenly-earthly (*insyan malikyan samā'yan aradyan*).⁶⁹⁵

This report is from the blind Abu'l-Khaṭṭāb Qatāda b. Di'āma (d. 117/735)

who was a Successor, a Mu'tazilī and a Qur'anic commentator⁶⁹⁶ whom Lawson calls

⁶⁹³ L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ḥurkūṣ b. Zuhayr al-Sa'dī," *El*². Al-Saddī might be a misspelling of a Companion named al-Sa'dī who was a Khārijī.

⁶⁹⁴ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, 410.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ Ch. Pellat, "Qatāda b. Di'āma b. Qatāda al-sadūsī, abu'l- khaṭṭāb," *El*².

Qatadah ibn Ba'ama.⁶⁹⁷ Without offering anything in return, Jesus asks for a

volunteer from among His disciples to be killed and amazingly someone responds.

Wahb b. Munabbih [said]: The Most-High Allāh began revealing to Jesus at the end of 30 years then Allāh raised Him to Him when He was 34 years [old] and His prophethood was 3 years.

The Most-High said:

«and [they] said»

meaning the Jews,

«We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God!»

So the Most-High proved them liars by [saying]:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him»⁶⁹⁸

Wahb b. Munabbih (d.110/728 or 114/732) was a Successor, a judge in Ṣan'ā'

and the earliest author of a *tales of the prophets*, the details of which he obtained

from Ka'b al-Aḥbār and 'Abd Allāh b. Salā; his work was relied upon by Ibn Ishāq, but is

not extant.⁶⁹⁹ The above story demonstrates the familiarity that Wahb had with the

Biblical account that Jesus had a three-year ministry that started when He was

thirty. It is the opinion of Wahb that the second half of the verse shows that Allah

proved that the Jews were lying when they said that they had crucified Jesus.

⁶⁹⁷ Lawson, 49.

⁶⁹⁸ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, 410.

⁶⁹⁹ R.G. Khoury, "Wahb b. Munabbih, Abū 'Abd Allāh," *ET*.

Lawson rightly points out that ‘The Qur’an itself only asserts that the Jews did not crucify Jesus. This is obviously different from saying that Jesus was not crucified.’⁷⁰⁰

Al-Kalbī [said]: The [scholars] disagree about [what] the Jews said:

We killed Him and we crucified Him.

A group amongst the Christians said:

On the contrary, we killed Him.

A[nother] group amongst them said:

Neither these (the Jews) nor these (the Christians) killed Him, rather Allāh raised Him to Him[self] while we were watching.

One [group] said when ʿĪsā was killed:

Didn’t you see that he was killed and crucified? So in this they differed and doubted.⁷⁰¹

Muḥammad b. Marwān⁷⁰² said:

It is said that Allāh put the likeness of Jesus on the face of ʿĪsā and it did not match the likeness of his body and his physical constitution. So when they killed him, they looked at him and said:

The face is the face of Jesus, only he is ʿĪsā.

It had been said that the one who was the likeness of Jesus and was crucified in His place was an Israeli man and he was called Joshua b. Madīn.⁷⁰³

Al-Saddī said:

Their difference about Him (Jesus) is that they said:

If this is Jesus, then where is our friend, and if this is our friend, then where is Jesus?

The Most-High Allāh said:

«with no knowledge to follow, only supposition:
they certainly did not kill him»

Which [means that] they certainly did not kill Jesus.

«No! God raised him up to Himself (Q. 4.158)»⁷⁰⁴

Al-Farrā’ and al-Qutaybā⁷⁰⁵ said:

⁷⁰⁰ Lawson, 12.

⁷⁰¹ Al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf*, 410.

⁷⁰² G.R. Hawting, “Marwān b. Muḥammad b. Marwān b. al-Ḥakam,” *Et*.²

⁷⁰³ Al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf*, 410. I have not found any other reference to Joshua b. Madīn.

⁷⁰⁴ Al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf*, 410.

The *hā'* in His saying:

«*ilayhi*»

[refers] to 'knowledge' meaning:

They certainly did not kill knowledge, just as you say:

'I knew thoroughly' (*qataltuhu 'ilmān*) and 'I knew certainly' (*qataltu yaqīnān*) because of opinion (*rā'y*) and a narrative transmitted by Muḥammad (*ḥadīth*).⁷⁰⁶

Al-Kalbī explains that in opposition to the claim that the Jews crucified Jesus, there were three claims circulating among the Christians: the Christians killed Jesus, Allah protected Jesus by raising Him and ʿĪsā was killed. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only story in which Christians have been accused of killing Jesus, much less to have made the claim themselves.

The story of Muḥammad b. Marwān introduces two new elements into the discussion while retaining the personality of ʿĪsā. Through this story, al-Thaʿlabī introduces the idea that the person who was killed had the face of Jesus, but not His body; this account is repeated later by al-Zamakhsharī.⁷⁰⁷ Al-Thaʿlabī also introduces Joshua b. Madīn. Al-Saddī elaborates on the story of Muḥammad b. Marwān by adding two questions proffered by the perplexed observers, which are

⁷⁰⁵ G. Lecomte, "Ibn ʿUṭayba, Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Muslim al-Dīnawarī," *Elʿ*; Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Muslim al-Dīnawarī Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) was born in 213/838 in Kūfa and became a reknown philologist who wrote *Kitāb Taʾwīl mushkil al-Ḥurʾān*.

⁷⁰⁶ Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf*, 410.

⁷⁰⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 396.

repeated by al-Zamakhsharī.⁷⁰⁸ Al-Tha‘labī includes a paraphrase of part of what al-Farrā’ has said about this verse;⁷⁰⁹ the complete interpretation of al-Farrā’ is discussed earlier. The *hā’* does not refer to ‘him’ meaning either ‘Jesus’ or ‘the substitute’ nor does it refer to ‘it’ meaning to ‘the crucifixion’. The *hā’* refers to ‘knowledge’, so that the *āya* really means ‘they knew it thoroughly or certainly’ because of a familiar Arabic idiom.

Al-Tha‘labī cites eleven reports in his exegesis of Q. 4.157. In addition to poetry, variant readings and grammar, he names five possible substitutes for Jesus: Ṭīṭyānūs (report 1), the Jewish guard (report 2), an unnamed Jew (report 3), a Jewish volunteer (report 4) and finally settles on Joshua b. Madīn (report 8). The idea is that the angel Gabriel raised Jesus to Allah while Allah cast Jesus’ image upon Joshua b. Madīn, whom the Jews crucified; the Jews did not know anything about it; Allah was angry and cursed the Jews.

10.3.3 A translation and analysis of the comments of al-Tha‘labī on Q. 3.55

Two of the nine reports that al-Tha‘labī uses to explain Q. 3.55 are worthy of inclusion here.

Ka‘b, al-Ḥasan, al-Kalbī, Maṭur al-Warrāq,⁷¹⁰ Muḥammad b. Ja‘far b. al-Zubayr, Ibn Jurayj and Ibn Zayd said: it means:

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁹ Al-Farrā’, *Ma‘ānī-l-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, 294.

⁷¹⁰ Note 1 says that he is Abū Bakr al-Warrāq.

that I am going to seize you:
and

I raised you from this world:
to [me]

without dying, [as] indicated by His saying:

«I will cause you to die (*mutawaffika*) (Q. 3.55)»

meaning, He takes Me to heaven and I am alive. His tribe (*Banu Israil*) only converted to Christianity after He raised Him, not after His death. On this saying about death, [there are two interpretations].

One of them:

I am raising You to Me.

Some of them said:

He was redeemed as well as paid in full, meaning He took Him fully.

Al-Rabī' b. 'Ānas said:

It means that I make you sleep and I raise you to some of your tribe.

Evidenced by His saying:

«It is He who calls your souls back by night. (Q. 6.60)»

It means, he makes you sleep, because sleep is the brother of death. He said:

«God takes souls at the time of death and the souls of the living while they sleep. He keeps hold of those whose death he has ordained and sends the others back until their appointed time: there truly are signs in this for those who reflect.»⁷¹¹

Zayd b. Thābit (d. 42-56/662-76) was a Companion who compiled the

canonical Qur'an under 'Uthman.⁷¹² Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767) was a Successor who is

credited as being the first Sunni *ḥadīth* collector and in whose collection many

Isrā'īliyyāt could be found.⁷¹³ Robinson reports that:

⁷¹¹ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, 81.

⁷¹² M. Lecker, "Zayd b. Thābit," *EI*².

⁷¹³ Scott C. Lucas, "Where are the Legal Ḥadīth? A Study of the Muṣannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba," *Islamic Law and Society*, 15 (2008), 291 (283-324); <http://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/hadith-science/1.htm>.

Suyūṭī [d. 911/1505]⁷¹⁴ says of Ibn Jurayj that he did not aim at reporting healthy traditions but transmitted what was mentioned concerning each āya regardless of whether it was “healthy” or “sick” [weak].⁷¹⁵

Kaʿb b. Ashraf (d. 3/625) was a Jewish Medinan poet who was assassinated because he incited the Quraysh to fight Muḥammad.⁷¹⁶ This story says that those who became Christians did so not because of Jesus’ death, but because Jesus was grasped and raised, taken, protected in a sleeping state, which was like death. The idea is that true Christians do not believe in Jesus’ crucifixion, but in Him sleeping after having been rescued.

Narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥa said: Truly, your death points to:
«Say ‘The angel of death put in charge of you will reclaim you, and then you will be brought back to your Lord.’ (Q. 32.11)»

And His saying:

Some of those We counted, We either overcame or took.

For interpretations on this saying: one of them: Wahb said that:

Allāh took Jesus three hours after noon then He gave Him life and raised Him.⁷¹⁷

Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687), who had been appointed governor of Baṣra by the caliph ‘Alī, lectured on exegesis, law, grammar, history, and poetry. According to Ibn Khallikān, ‘He was considered as the ablest interpreter of the Koran then in existence. And it was said of him that none knew better the traditions, the legal decisions of the three first khalifs, the law, the interpretation of the Koran, and the

⁷¹⁴ E. Geoffroy, “Suyūṭī,” *El*².

⁷¹⁵ Robinson, “Birds”, 5.

⁷¹⁶ W. Montgomery Watt, “Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf,” *El*².

⁷¹⁷ Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf*, 81.

sciences of poetry and arithmetic.’ ‘He used to say: ‘When you meet with a difficulty in the Koran, look for its solution in the poems of the Arabs, for these are the registers of the Arabic nation.’⁷¹⁸

Death means to be taken back to Allah and Allah took Jesus back to Himself at 3pm in order to separate Jesus from the unbelieving Jews, but Jesus will die after he returns to earth from heaven. Since men do not live as long as palm trees, it is arrogant to think that anybody can escape death.

10.3.4 Observations

Of the thirteen *ḥadīths* that al-Tha‘labī quotes, only the ninth one concerns grammar and that merely repeats the report of al-Farrā’ that analyzes the *hu* in *qatalūhu*, which appears to have also been repeated by Ibn Qutayba. Even though that report does not play a central role in his exegesis, al-Tha‘labī introduces both Ṭīṭyānūs and Joshua b. Madīn to the list of substitutes who died in place of Jesus; Ṭīṭyānūs appears in the later works of al-Ṭabarsī, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, but this is the only appearance of Joshua b. Mādīn. Al-Tha‘labī teaches that true Christians do not believe in Jesus’ crucifixion, but rather that they believe that He is sleeping after having been rescued by the Angel Gabriel while Allah was casting

⁷¹⁸ Ibn Kh., deSl., I, 87 n. 3.

the image of Jesus upon Joshua b. Madīn, whom the Jews crucified; the Jews do not know anything about it; Allah is so angry that He cursed the Jews.

10.4 Discussion

Al-Farrā' uses grammar to explain that the last phrase of Q. 4.157, *wamā qatalūhu yaqīnān*, means 'I know it thoroughly' and 'I know it certainly'. Al-Farrā' also explains that the first occurrence of *qatalūhu* in Q. 4.157 refers to Jesus; he explains that Q. 3.55 means that Jesus was 'seized' from the cross then 'raised' to Allāh and will later return to earth where He will later die; and he explains Q. 3.54 with a substitution legend. This triple denial of the crucifixion of Jesus by al-Farrā' is quite the opposite of Lawson's explanation that al-Farrā' is only concerned with the pronomial suffix to the second *mā qatalūhu*.

Al-Zajjāj uses grammar three times, not as convincingly as al-Farrā', but like his predecessor, he ultimately resorts to substitution legends, and in his case, he cites contradictory substitution legends without making an effort reconcile them.

Al-Tha'labī repeats the report of al-Farrā' that analyzes the *hu* in *qatalūhu*. Even though that report does not play a central role in his exegesis, al-Tha'labī introduces both ʾIṣṭyānūs and Joshua b. Madīn to the list of substitutes that died in place of Jesus.

While these three scholars used grammar to determine the two nouns to which the two instances of *hu* refer in two citings of *qatalūhu*, the only real

grammatical contribution is the clarification that *wa mā qatalūhu yaqīnān* is best translated as:

«I knew it thoroughly»

which has rarely been picked up in English translations. Most significantly, all three of these grammarians cited substitution legends as their defining interpretation of Q. 4.157 in order to deny the crucifixion of Jesus.

Chapter 11-Arguments in which the prophethood of Muhammad is rejected on the basis of the Crucifixion of Jesus (245/859-470/1077)

This chapter deals with two hotly contested lines of reasoning; one takes the form of a polemical lecture while the other takes the form of a debate.

Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī delivered his lecture, *Majlis* 520, in Cairo's *Dār al-'ilm* in 463/1070 in order to respond to one of the anti-prophetic arguments that Ibn al-Rāwandī had published in his *Kitāb al-zumurrud* in Baghdad over two centuries earlier, in the 240s/850s. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933-4) debated with Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī (d. 313/925, 'Rhazes') about the prophethood of Muhammad in the Ziyārid capital of Rayy in 310/923. The prophethood of Muhammad, not the crucifixion of Jesus, was the real subject of both this lecture and the debate. Since the *Kitāb al-zumurrud* predates the debate, the lecture is addressed here first.

11.1 *Ibn al-Rāwandī* (d. 245/859)

11.1.1 *Ibn al-Rāwandī* (d. 245/859)

Abu'l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Ishāq al-Rāwandī (d. 245/859) was born in the village of Rāwand near Iṣfāhān in 199/815 and moved to Baghdad. As the leading Mu'tazilī *mutakallim* (polemicist), he wrote the authoritative book on polemics, *Kitāb adab al-jadal*. Ibn al-Rāwandī argues that reason is needed in order to acquire knowledge of God, because revelation does not explain all the elements of faith. His work demonstrates how the methods of the Mu'tazilīs conflicted with a consensus that was developing among the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. Although Ibn Khallikān says that he maintained his reputation in Persia as a 'celebrated scholar' and 'one of the most talented men of his time', he fell out with the Baghdādī Mu'tazilīs.⁷¹⁹

Ibn al-Rāwandī composed over one hundred works, including the now no longer extant *Kitāb al-zumurrud*, so it cannot be known exactly what this latter work says. Reliance must therefore be placed on the quotations from this lost book in the works of al-Shīrāzī. The anti-prophecy arguments of Ibn al-Rāwandī include

⁷¹⁹Ibn Kh., deSl., I, 76-7; Paul Kraus, "Ibn al-Rāwandī or al-Rēwendī, Abu'l-Ḥusayn Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā b. Ishāq," *El*²; Sarah Stroumsa, "Ibn al-Rawandī, Abu'l-Husayn Ahmad ibn Yahya" *MIC*, 349; Lawson, 78; Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, Brill, 1999), 37-8, 45-6, 172; Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 190. Stroumsa erroneously equates 815 to 205, rather than 199. Lawson and Kraus' statement that Ibn al-Rāwandī died in the mid to late tenth-century must be mistaken because it is unlikely that Ibn al-Rāwandī lived to be 150-200 years old.

extolling the sufficiency of reason and arguing against the inimitability of the Qur'an (*i'jāz*), ritual prayer, the *hajj*, miracles, and *ḥadīth* concerning miracles. His argument that prophets are nothing more than magicians who manipulate their natural environments by sleight of hand has earned him the label of *zindīq*, 'heretic' and 'the most notorious freethinker in medieval Islam'.⁷²⁰

Nonetheless, it is important to know that by this time *zindīq* had come to be used against anyone who competed with the political/religious apparatus of Islam. It is also noteworthy that Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936), who pointed out the same conflict between *ḥadīth* and reason, was not called a 'heretic'. Ibn al-Nadīm reports about Ibn al-Rāwandī that 'there was no one among his peers who was keener than he was on theology or more known for his precision'.⁷²¹

In his *Kitāb al-zumurrud*, Ibn al-Rāwandī documents a dialogue against prophecy between himself, whom he refers to as *al-mulḥid* (the heretic, unbeliever, apostate, renegade), and his mentor, al-Warrāq, whom he refers to as *al-khaṣm* (the adversary).⁷²² An introduction to his mentor is followed by an introduction to al-Shīrāzī, in whose lecture is found a response to the arguments of Ibn al-Rāwandī.

⁷²⁰Ibn Kh., deSl., I, 76-7; *Fihrist*, 419; Kraus, "Ibn al-Rāwandī," Stroumsa, "Ibn al-Rawandi," 349; Lawson, 78; Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 79-86, 93; quotes from Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 71n. 141.

⁷²¹*Fihrist*, 420, 420n. 215.

⁷²²Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 47-9, 65 and 85.

11.1.2 Al-Warrāq (d. 247/861)

Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn b. Muḥammad al-Warrāq (d. 247/861) was a ‘brilliant [Muʿtazilī] theologian’⁷²³ and ‘an astonishing intellectual genius’. His primary work was one of the earliest systematic heresiographies entitled *Kitāb maqālāt al-nās wa-ikhtilāfihim* in which he argues against Arab paganism, Manichean dualism, Judaism and three branches of Christianity. The now non-extant *Maqālāt* was so important that al-Ashʿarī cited it. The *Kitāb al-radd ʿalā l-firāq al-thalāth min al-Naṣārā* of al-Warrāq asks whether the Jews killed Jesus in accordance with the will of Allah.⁷²⁴

11.1.3 Muʿayyad fiʾl-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077)

Abū Naṣr Hibat Allāh b. Mūsā b. Abī ʿImrān b. Dāwūd al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077) was born in 389/999 to a Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī family living in Shīrāz, the most important of the three Būyid regional capitals. He acquired the *laqab* al-Muʿayyad fiʾl-Dīn (The one aided [by Allah] in religion) when he succeeded his father as chief *dāʿī* (propagandist) of the Fārs *jazīra* (an island [of Ismāʿīlī propagandist activity]) when he was 29. Al-Shīrāzī was promoted to *dāʿī al-dūʿāt* (chief propagandist) in

⁷²³ *Fihrist*, 419.

⁷²⁴ Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 40-6, 65, 70 and 85; S.M. Stern, “Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq,” *Elʿ*; David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 9, 132, 137, 139, 189n.58; Swanson, *Folly to the Ḥunafāʾ: The Cross*, 66.

450/1058. The collection of his 800 al-Azhar lectures (*majālis*) remains the most important work of Ismā‘īlī literature.⁷²⁵

11.1.3.1 *Majlis 520*

The *majālis* 517-522 of al-Shīrāzī preserve ‘extensive quotations of the *Kitāb al-zumurrud*, in which Ibn al-Rāwandī dared to shake with impudent mockery the fundamental pillar of Islam, the doctrine of prophecy’.⁷²⁶ It is in *Majlis 520* that a discussion of the crucifixion of Jesus is found, but al-Shīrāzī is concerned with defending the doctrine of the Imāmate, the central Fāṭimid doctrine, and not with the crucifixion of Jesus. It was the compelling nature and enduring influence of the arguments of Ibn al-Rāwandī that required a response more than two centuries after he died in faraway Khurasan. *Majlis 520* consists of six paragraphs, an opening invocation, a closing benediction and a four-paragraph argument.

⁷²⁵Ibn Kh., deSl., I, 172-3; C. Cahen, “Buwayhids or Būyids,” *Et*²; Verena Klemm, “Mu’ayyad fi al-Dīn, al-,” *MIC*, 522; Husain F. al-Hamdānī, “The History of the Ismā‘īlī Da‘wa and its Literature during the last phase of the Fāṭimid Empire” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1932), 127; Verena Klemm, *Memoirs of a Mission: The Ismaili Scholar, Statesman and Poet al-Mu’ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), xiii, 13, 48, 91, 108; Klemm citing Husain al-Hamdani, xvi; Farhad Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 130.

⁷²⁶P. Kraus. “Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzergeschichte: Das Kitāb az-Zumurrudh Des Ibn ar-Rāwandī”, *RSO XIV* (1933): 94-5.

11.1.4 Translation and analysis of *Majlis* 520

11.1.4.1 *The first paragraph of Majlis 520; opening invocation*

The *majlis* begins with a panegyrical section praising Allah for the messages which He has sent through the intermediary of the Imāms who have descended from the family of Muhammad:

In the name of Allāh, the Compassionate, the Merciful;
praise be to Allāh, who revealed the Imāms from the family of Muḥammad;
may the prayers of Allāh be upon him and upon them;⁷²⁷

Writing in rhymed prose, al-Shīrāzī states that Allah created the stars (*nujūman*) for the purpose of stoning (*rujūman*) devils, ‘heretics’ and ‘freethinkers’. He uses guilt-by-association to link Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Warrāq with Satan. He then inserts Q. 37.6-8, which teaches that the heavens are protected by stars that keep rebellious mocking devils from eavesdropping on conversations between angels by pelting them with shooting stars from every side. Ending in *jānib*, *wāsib* and *thāqib*, these verses also rhyme. The Qur’anic citation alludes to a similar line of reasoning found later in the *sūra*. Non-believers (verse 29) accused Muhammad of being a mad poet (verse 36) for which they received the painful punishment (verses 31, 33 and 38) of Hellfire (verse 23) on ‘the Day of Judgment which they used to

⁷²⁷The Arabic text of Mu’ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520, in Kraus, “Beiträge,” paragraph 1 on page 103.

deny' (verse 21). The invocation then moves on to shower praises on Muhammad, who is the most splendid, important and elevated of all the prophets:

May the prayers of Allah be upon
the most dazzling of the prophets as regards proof (*burhānan*),
and the most distinct of them as regards importance (*shā'nan*),
and the most exalted of them as regards a place (*makānan*)
near Allāh,
Muhammad, to whom was sent a recitation (*Qur'ānan*).⁷²⁸

All four three phrases of this blessing rhyme. The reference to Muhammad being the nearest to Allah prepares us for the argument that Jesus is near Allah.

Praise is also due to Muhammad's equal, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and to the Imāms whom Allah has chosen to raise to high ranks; once again rhyming phrases are used. The invocation closes with the words:

O assembly of believers! Allāh made you a source for the truth, as He distinguished you from those who departed their religion and were sectarian. You have heard what was delivered to you from the speech of the 'heretic' and the answer to it is what removes uncertainty (*shubah*); it removes blindness and wandering [from the true path].⁷²⁹

Al-Shirāzī ends his invocation by addressing the assembled believers and reassuring them that Allah has shown them the true path and has separated them from those who follow heresy. He further states that he has both summarised the work of Ibn al-Rāwandī and answered it so that no uncertainty remains. All thirty-

⁷²⁸*Ibid.*

⁷²⁹*Ibid.*

one phrases in both the opening invocation and the closing benediction rhyme. In an oblique play on words, al-Shīrāzī prays for the removal of uncertainty (*shubah*) by using the same ‘sh-b-h’ root that appears in *shubbiha*, whose solitary Qur’anic appearance is in the only verse (Q. 4.157) that mentions Jesus’ crucifixion explicitly. Al-Shīrāzī returns to this allusion in the closing benediction where he asks Allah to free those who attended his lecture from the uncertain things of religion. Both times, *shubah* means ‘uncertain’, not ‘substitute’.

11.1.4.2 The Argument in the second to the fifth paragraphs of Majlis 520

Since the body of this lecture consists of less than 500 Arabic words that do not completely fill two pages in the printed edition, it must be understood to be a summary of the lecture. Ibn al-Rāwandī is not really concerned with Jesus’ crucifixion; he is a champion of reason who opposes the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and their *mutawātir* principle of interpretation. Because he argues that the *mutawātir* principle logically leads to the denial of Muhammad’s prophethood, al-Shīrāzī argues against him in three ways. First, an unnamed *dā’ī* asserts that Muhammad is a prophet whether or not he performed miracles. Second, it is argued that most of the Jewish and Christian reports concerning Jesus’ crucifixion are lies. Lastly, al-Shīrāzī innovatively provides an explanation for a paradox that he fabricates.

There is an intermediary between al-Shīrāzī and Ibn al-Rāwandī that makes interpretation difficult. Al-Shīrāzī did not read the *Kitāb al-zumurrud*, but rather he read a work that was composed by an unnamed Ismāʿīlī propagandist (*dāʿī*) who refuted the anti-prophecy position that Ibn al-Rāwandī had attributed to al-Warrāq. Both the unnamed *dāʿī* and al-Shīrāzī argue against Ibn al-Rāwandī. The second paragraph introduces *adāʿī*,⁷³⁰ who although unnamed, appears to be a contemporary of Ibn al-Rāwandī,⁷³¹ and he seems to remain the speaker until al-Shīrāzī introduces himself in the fifth paragraph. The lecture mentions two arguments that seem appropriate to attribute to Ibn al-Rāwandī along with arguments that seem to have been put into his mouth by al-Shīrāzī. Muhammad plays a role, but words are also put into his mouth. When translating the *majlis* of al-Shīrāzī, and when reading modern scholarship concerning it, discernment is required to determine whether each pronominal suffix refers to Allah, Muhammad, al-Shīrāzī, al-Warrāq, Ibn al-Rāwandī, or the unnamed *dāʿī*.

11.1.4.3 The second paragraph of Majlis 520; the *mubāhala* verse

The second paragraph starts with a response from the *dāʿī*:

⁷³⁰ Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 48, 70.

⁷³¹ Kraus, “Beiträge,” 95.

The infidel [Ibn al-Rāwandī] refuted the curse verse,⁷³² its occasions [of revelation] and the meaning of His saying, glory to Allah:

«Then you should long for death - if your claim is true. (Q. 2.94 and 62.6)»

and what follows from the verses which he [Ibn al-Rāwandī] mentioned.⁷³³

A *dāʿī* then summarises the argument between Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Warrāq. It is not clear whether this *dāʿī* is al-Shīrāzī or an unnamed *dāʿī* who transmitted this material to al-Shīrāzī. Kraus asserts that al-Shīrāzī presents the ‘fully-preserved’ argument of an unknown *dāʿī* who includes so many ‘quotations from the *Kitāb al-zumurrud*’ that it ‘can be fairly accurately reconstructed’.⁷³⁴ Stroumsa argues that the pro-prophecy arguments of Ibn al-Rāwandī have mostly been replaced by those of the *dāʿī* so that Ibn al-Rāwandī is only heard through a couple of phrases in this paragraph.⁷³⁵ It is quite difficult to determine which words belong to al-Warrāq, which belong to Ibn al-Rāwandī and which belong to the unnamed *dāʿī*.

⁷³² The Arabic text of Muʿayyad fiʾl-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520, in P. Kraus, “Beiträge,” mentions Q. 3.54 which reads ‘And the unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but God brought their scheming to nought: for God is above all schemers’, but it is actually Q. 3.61 which reads ‘and then let us pray [together] humbly and ardently, and let us invoke God's curse upon those [of us] who are telling a lie,’ that parallels Q. 2.94 and 62.6.

⁷³³ The Arabic text of Muʿayyad fiʾl-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520, in Kraus, “Beiträge,” paragraph 2 on page 103.

⁷³⁴ Kraus, “Beiträge”, 95.

⁷³⁵ Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 53.

This *dā'i* asserts that the whole argument of Ibn al-Rāwandī is nothing more than conjecture that is full of obvious shortcomings, rather than identifying and arguing against specific conjecture and shortcomings. However, it is al-Warrāq and Ibn al-Rāwandī who use the sound method of interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an.

11.1.4.4 The third paragraph of Majlis 520; Muhammad's miracles vs. Jesus' crucifixion

The third paragraph concerns *ḥadīths* about five miracles that authenticate the prophethood of Muhammad. These five miracles concern the ablution bowl, the ewe of 'Umm Ma'bad, a man named Surāqa who pursued Muhammad on his *hijra* to Medina, the talking wolf, and the talking poisoned ewe. Since these miracles are not found in the Qur'an, but rather originate in later *ḥadīth*, their soundness cannot be taken for granted. The third paragraph reads:

What he [Ibn al-Rāwandī] said is that the Prophet, may the prayers of Allāh be upon him and his family, rejected the view of both similar great religions [Judaism and Christianity] that agree on the truth of the killing of the Messiah, peace be upon Him, and His crucifixion, then he [Muḥammad] accused both of them [the Jews and the Christians] of lying. If it was permissible that he [Muḥammad should] invalidate [the reports of] that great multitudinous crowd and attribute lying and falsehood to both of them [the Jews and Christians], [then] rejecting the trifling small group [of Muslims] who transmitted these reports about him [Muḥammad] is [just as] possible and permissible.⁷³⁶

⁷³⁶ The Arabic text of Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis 520*, in Kraus, "Beiträge," paragraph 3 on page 104.

Against the principle of *ijmā'*, Ibn al-Rāwandī argues that 'The lie of everybody/the universal lie is indeed nothing but the lie of each individual'.⁷³⁷ His line of reasoning shows that it is 'absurd when the number of Muslims in agreement over this or that religious question or tradition is contemptibly small in number in comparison to the masses of Christians and Jews'.⁷³⁸

This paragraph mentions *ḥadīth* originating from three distinct communities. There was a 'trifling small group [of Muslims] who transmitted reports' concerning five of Muhammad's miracles that were accepted at face value. The paragraph then mentions that many reports originating with 'both similar great religions agree on the truth of the killing of the Messiah and His crucifixion.' The last part of this paragraph says that Muhammad accused both the Jews and Christians of lying and that it was acceptable for Muhammad to reject the many Jewish and Christian reports and to attribute lying and obfuscation to both of them.' While such a stance was attributed to Muhammad, it seems unlikely that Muhammad accused the Jews and the Christians of lying about the crucifixion of Jesus.

If Muhammad had said that the Jews and Christians had lied about Jesus' crucifixion, the matter would have been settled among Muslims forever. Muslims

⁷³⁷Kraus, "Beiträge," 125.

⁷³⁸*Ibid.*

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would consistently cite that sound *ḥadīth* when confronted with historical accounts of Jesus' crucifixion proffered by Greeks, Romans, Jews, secularists, and Christians. If Muhammad had accused the Jews and the Christians of lying about Jesus' crucifixion during the early seventh century, Ibn al-Rāwandī would have been aware of that and he would not have based his argument on reports that Muhammad had rejected. The accusation that Jewish and Christian reports are lies can best be understood as al-Shīrāzī putting words into Muhammad's mouth.

Ibn al-Rāwandī argues that because a vast number of witnesses testified to Jesus' crucifixion and a trifling small number of witnesses testified to Muhammad's miracles, the rejection of Jesus' crucifixion requires the rejection of Muhammad's miracles along with his claim to be a prophet. Since the form of his greater to lesser argument is sound, its conclusion is valid as long as the propositions are true. The crucifixion is a proposition of his argument against the two Sunni exegetical principles of *mutawātir* (handed down in uninterrupted sequence) and *ijmā'*; it is not his argument's conclusion.

Islam's central doctrines are 'the oneness of Allah' (*tawḥīd*) and the prophethood of Muhammad. Reports concerning five miracles attributed to Muhammad are important in authenticating Muhammad's prophethood. Christology, the person and the work of Jesus, is Christianity's central doctrine.

Christian dogma holds that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine and that His work was dying on the cross. By pitting reports concerning Muhammad's miracles against reports concerning Jesus' crucifixion, the argument of Ibn al-Rāwandī involves some of the most central doctrines of both Islam and Christianity. Ibn al-Rāwandī argues that the rejection of Jesus' crucifixion logically requires the rejection of Muhammad's prophethood. It is not only the exceedingly great number of people who reported Jesus' crucifixion that gives strength to his argument, but it is also the fact that the Jews and the Christians, who agreed on the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion, were rival communities.

The third paragraph ends with an *ad hominem* argument in which the unnamed *dā'ī* calls the work of Ibn al-Rāwandī 'slander' and 'arrogance.'

11.1.4.5 The fourth paragraph of Majlis 520; no need for miracles

The fourth paragraph argues that because Khadīja, Waraqa, 'Alī, and Abū Bakr acknowledged the prophethood of Muhammad without witnessing any miracles, miracles are not necessary to authenticate Muhammad's prophethood. This argument only establishes that Muhammad's leadership skills attracted

followers; it does not establish that Muhammad is a prophet. This is a *non-sequitur* argument.⁷³⁹

11.1.4.6 The fifth paragraph of Majlis 520; Jews and Christian lied; hypostatic union

Al-Shīrāzī begins his discussion in this fifth paragraph by restating the fabricated report that he had put into Muhammad's mouth in the third paragraph in which 'both a great number and an abundant majority [of the Jewish and Christian reporters had] lied'. Al-Shīrāzī likewise places into the mouth of Ibn al-Rāwandīa paradox that is based upon a pair of seemingly contradictory arguments that are the necessary consequences of their underlying propositions. These 'straw-man' arguments take the following forms:

A: If 'death is necessary for all humans', and
B: If Jesus 'appeared in the image of mankind',
C: Then, it is necessary for Jesus to die.

And

D: If 'Jesus is Allah', and
E: If it is impossible for Allah to die,
F: Then, it is impossible for Jesus to die.

The first argument is that Jesus is subject to the same death that all humans face. The second argument is that Jesus' divinity presumes His immortality. The paradox that it is both necessary and impossible for Jesus to die demands to be

⁷³⁹The Arabic text of Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520, in Kraus, "Beiträge," paragraph 4 on page 104.

resolved. The only reason that death has to be redefined is because Jesus is both God and man. Without a paradox consisting of the necessity and impossibility of Jesus' death, there is no reason to redefine Jesus' death. This may be why al-Shīrāzī does not argue against the divinity of Jesus.

Al-Shīrāzī cites Q. 4.157, then Q. 3.169, and then a Shī'ī *ḥadīth* in which Imāms remain alive through occultation. Echoing Muhammad's status in the opening invocation, al-Shīrāzī argues that like the dead prophet Muhammad, the dead prophet Jesus is living a blessed life 'near Allāh' in Paradise. Al-Shīrāzī explains that the «they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him» that is found in Q. 4.157 really means that «those who have been killed in God's way...are alive with their Lord» (Q. 3.163). Jesus can be thought of as living in a state similar to Muhammad, the Imāms or the martyrs. Even though Jesus has been killed, He remains alive.

It is remarkable that Q. 4.157 is used as merely a transition to Q. 3.169 rather than as an introduction to substitution legends. Rather than substantiating that there was an *ijmā'* concerning substitution legends, al-Shīrāzī does not demonstrate that he is aware of their existence. In fact, his explanation that Jesus is alive is a counter-example to substitution legends, which proves that there was not a consensus concerning substitution legends at his time.

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that Ibn al-Rāwandī held these views. If al-Shīrāzī thought that Ibn al-Rāwandī believed that Jesus is divine, he would have accused him of being a Christian, rather than a ‘freethinker’ (*zindīq*). By twice stating that ‘regardless of whether or not the speaker said so’, al-Shīrāzī hints that Ibn al-Rāwandī did not actually say what al-Shīrāzī attributes to him.

Even though al-Shīrāzī rejected Jewish and Christian reports concerning Jesus’ crucifixion, he did not reject Jesus’ death. He repeatedly tells us that Jesus ‘was killed in the way of Allah,’ that ‘death and killing are necessary for Him,’ and that Jesus is like an Imām in occultation.⁷⁴⁰

11.1.4.7 The sixth paragraph of Majlis 520; the closing benediction

In the closing rhyming benediction, al-Shīrāzī mentions that he will cover the rest of this subject in an upcoming lecture, and then he prays that Allah will clarify the uncertain things of religion for those who have attended his lecture. He concludes by praising Allah then asking for prayers upon Muhammad, ‘Alī, the Imāms, and upon Muslims. Mentioning that Muhammad was a *dā’ī* elevates the

⁷⁴⁰The Arabic text of Mu’ayyad fi’l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520, in Kraus, “Beiträge,” paragraph 5 on page 104-5.

status of both the unnamed *dā'i* and himself. He repeats *shubah*, the root of which appears in Q. 4.157.⁷⁴¹

11.1.5 Observations

Lawson evaluates the exegesis of al-Shīrāzī as follows:

The other work in which Massignon found a positive reading [of Jesus' crucifixion] was the *Majālis* of Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1077), where this scholar cites Q. 3:163, that martyrs do not really die but are alive with God, in order to refute the so-called *zindiq* Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. mid-late tenth century), who, in his *Kitāb al-zumurrudh*, questioned the veracity of the Qur'an precisely because it negated the crucifixion of Jesus. This, according to Mu'ayyad, was in clear opposition to an overwhelming agreement among 'concordant' (perhaps *mutawātir*?) testimonies coming from two major religious communities.⁷⁴²

While al-Shīrāzī implies that Jesus died because He is a martyr, he does not explicitly state that the crucifixion was the means of death. Ibn al-Rāwandī did not question the veracity of the Qur'an, but rather he attacked two principles of interpretation, *mutawātir* and *ijmā'*. He did so by formulating an argument that positions *ḥadīth* concerning Jesus' crucifixion against *ḥadīths* concerning Muhammad's miracles. Ibn al-Rāwandī, not al-Shīrāzī, appealed to the overwhelming agreement coming from two major religious communities. The first two of these errors can rightly be attributed to Louis Massignon, who writes:

⁷⁴¹The Arabic text of Mu'ayyad fī'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Majlis* 520, in Kraus, "Beiträge," paragraph 6 on page 105.

⁷⁴²Lawson, 78.

The second text of the Ismā'īlī Mu'ayyad Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077) is his 520th *Majālis*, which also affirms the death of Christ on the cross. In using also Q. 3.163 to refute a *mutakallim* who had become a 'zindīq,' Ibn al-Rāwandī, this author, had in his *kitāb al-Zumurrud*, questioned the veracity of the Qur'ān, which in denying the crucifixion of Christ contradicted an overwhelming majority of converging testimonies coming from 'two great communities'.⁷⁴³

There are several observations that can be made from *Majlis* 520 of al-Shīrāzī. Al-Shīrāzī was *dā'īal-dū'āt* when the Fāṭimid Empire was the largest Muslim empire of the day. He remains one of the preeminent Ismā'īlī scholars of all time. He clearly demonstrates his mastery of literary Arabic in *Majlis* 520 by rhyming every phrase in both the opening invocation and the closing benediction, linking the proximity of Muhammad to Allah with the proximity of Jesus to Allah, linking Q. 2.94, 3.161 and 62.6 to the credibility of Jewish and Christian reports and in his two allusions to the ambiguous *shubbiha lahum*. In light of these remarkable credentials, his arguments prove to be surprisingly weak. He is better with language than with logic.

Since Q. 4.157 is usually explained through substitution legends, and since the Fāṭimids ruled a substantial part of the Muslim world and since al-Shīrāzī demonstrates no knowledge of substitution legends, but rather offers an independent interpretation, there may or may not have been a consensus (*ijmā'*)

⁷⁴³ Louis Massignon, 'Le Christ dans les évangiles selon Ghazali' *Revue des études Islamiques* VI (1932):534–35.

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concerning substitution legends during the eleventh century among Sunni
scholars, but there was certainly no consensus among all Muslim scholars.

Also surprising are some of the arguments attributable to the unnamed *dā'ī*. In the second paragraph, the unnamed *dā'ī* labels an interpretation by Ibn al-Rāwandī as 'conjecture', rather than explaining what is wrong about the interpretation. In the third paragraph, he uses an *ad hominem* attack by calling Ibn al-Rāwandī slanderous and arrogant. The fourth paragraph is a *non-sequitur* argument. While these logical fallacies are attributed to the unnamed *dā'ī*, al-Shīrāzī chose to use these arguments in a most important lecture and he put words into the mouths of Ibn al-Rāwandī and Muhammad, one cannot help but wonder whether the words of the unnamed *dā'ī* are also his fabrication.

While the second paragraph shows that both al-Warrāq and Ibn al-Rāwandī interpreted the Qur'an by the Qur'an, the fifth paragraph shows that al-Shīrāzī uses *ḥadīths* to explain the Qur'an; he rejects *ḥadīths* that have been transmitted by Jews and Christians for eight centuries and he fabricates *ḥadīths* for Muhammad.

The point that Ibn al-Rāwandī is making to his Sunni rivals is that citing *ḥadīth* to interpret the Qur'an is not reasonable, even if a consensus results. Since the core Muslim belief in the prophethood of Muhammad was involved in the argument, Ismā'īlīs felt the need to reply. This is because Muhammad's role as a

prophet is central to the political and religious authority of Ismā'īlī Imāms. It is the challenging nature of the arguments made by Ibn al-Rāwandī that made his work worthy of an attack two centuries after his death.

Since this favourable summary of his own lecture was written by al-Shīrāzī himself, it seems reasonable to think that these are the best arguments with which he can respond to Ibn al-Rāwandī. One cannot help but think that if al-Shīrāzī had been debating against Ibn al-Rāwandī, that the latter would have pointed out these fabrications and logical fallacies. It also seems likely that al-Shīrāzī would have lost a face-to-face debate against Ibn al-Rāwandī.

Of most interest to this project are two findings. Ibn al-Rāwandī does not argue for Jesus' crucifixion, but rather Jesus' crucifixion is one of the propositions of an argument against Muhammad's prophethood contained in the third paragraph of the response of al-Shīrāzī. He argues that because there is a vast array of reports concerning Jesus' crucifixion and only a handful of reports concerning Muhammad's miracles, rejecting Jesus' crucifixion logically entails rejecting Muhammad's prophethood. Second, even though al-Shīrāzī argues that Jesus is now in a highly honoured position near to Allah, he does not explicitly argue against Jesus' crucifixion, but rather he repeatedly argues for His special condition

after His death, without denying that His death was suffered by means of crucifixion.

11.2 Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (310/923)

Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933-4), the fifth Qarmaṭī Ismāʿīlī dāʿī of Rayy, debated with the renowned philosopher/physician Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyāʾ al-Rāzī (d. 313/925, 'Rhazes') about the prophethood of Muhammad in the Ziyārid capital of Rayy in 310/923. *A'lām al-nubuwwa* is the account written by Abū Ḥātim to summarise his debate with Rhazes, in which Abū Ḥātim upholds prophecy as the sole source of true knowledge.⁷⁴⁴ Since we have only the one-sided account of Abū Ḥātim and since Rhazes is quite well known, only the background of Abū Ḥātim is provided here.

11.2.1 Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933-4)

11.2.1.1 Background

Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933-4) became the fifth Qarmaṭī Ismāʿīlī dāʿī of Rayy in 300/912. He significantly expanded his territory by sending dāʿīs to Ṭabaristān, Gurgān, Iṣfāhān, and Azerbaijan, while he personally converted a number of important early tenth-century Persian leaders to Ismāʿīlism. When the

⁷⁴⁴ Shin Nomoto, *Early Ismāʿīlī Thought on Prophecy According to the Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ by Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī* (d. ca. 322/934/5) (Montreal: unpublished McGill University dissertation, 1999), 26.

Turkish Sāmānid troops killed the emir in 311/924, Abū Ḥātim fled to Ṭabaristān, then to Daylam.⁷⁴⁵

The importance of Abū Ḥātim as a scholar can be seen in the fact that the *salafī* Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 829/1427) used the *Kitāb al-zīna* of Abū Ḥātim as a resource for studying the foreign vocabulary of the Qur’ān⁷⁴⁶ and his *Kitāb al-jarḥ wa’l-ta’dīl* remains an important tool for discerning the reputations of *ḥadīth* transmitters.⁷⁴⁷

While Abū Ḥātim was in Rayy, he debated with Rhazes and wrote *A’lām al-nubuwwa*. At stake in this debate was the veracity of both the Qur’an and Muhammad. The debate between this Qarmatī Ismā’īlī *dā’ī* and this Neo-Platonic ‘infidel’ was conducted in front of an audience that included pagans, Zaydīs and the state’s emir, Mardāwīj, who had shifted his religious affiliation from paganism to Sunnism to Zoroastrianism. Mardāwīj rejected Ismā’īlism, possibly when judging

⁷⁴⁵Nomoto, *Early Ismā’īlī Thought*, 18, 21; Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdān al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ*, ed. Ḥasan Mīnūchehr and Mehdī Moḥagegh, intro. Shin Nomoto (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1418/1998), 4-5; S.M. Stern, “Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Aḥmad b. Ḥamdān,” *Et*²; Farhad Daftary, *The Isma’ilis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 122 and 165.

⁷⁴⁶Abū Ḥātim, *Iṣlāḥ*, 10.

⁷⁴⁷*Mishkāṭ*, vol. 1, xii.

this very debate, so Abū Ḥātim fled to Azerbaijan, where he stayed for the rest of his life.⁷⁴⁸

A'lām al-nubuwwa is divided into seven chapters, six of which are further separated into divisions. The fifth division of the fourth chapter, which is entitled 'No Difference between the Prophets in the Essentials' and includes ten paragraphs, begins by mentioning the 'infidel' (*mulḥid*), whom he identifies as Rhazes. Abū Ḥātim mentions that the Christians claim that Jesus is 'the Son of God' (*Ibn Allāh*), 'the Son of Good News' (*Ibn al-bushr*) and 'The Son of Man' (*Ibn al-insān*), that they are 'the sons of God' (*abnā' Allāh*) and that the Jews are 'the sons of Satan' (*abnā' Shayṭān*), before delving into his actual disputation with Rhazes concerning Jesus' crucifixion.⁷⁴⁹ The three pertinent paragraphs of 'No Difference between the Prophets in the Essentials' of the *A'lām al-nubuwwa* of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī are translated below.

11.2.1.2 Translation and analysis of three paragraphs of 'No Difference between the Prophets in the Essentials' of the *A'lām al-nubuwwa* of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī

If the infidel [Rhazes] says that the Qur'ān opposes what the Jews and the Christians say about the killing of the Messiah, peace be upon Him, because the Jews and the Christians say that the Messiah was killed and crucified, but the Qur'ān says that He was not killed and He was not crucified, but that

⁷⁴⁸Stern, "Abū Ḥātim," *El*²; Abū Ḥātim, *Iṣlāḥ*, 8, 10; Minorsky, "al-Rayy," *El*².

⁷⁴⁹Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa: al-radd 'alā al-mulḥid Abī Bakr al-Rāzī* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li'l-taḥdīth al-Fikrī, 1424/2003), 9, 126-30.

Allah raised Him to Him, then we say: truly, what is in the Qur'ān is right and true, and Allah is applying it [the Qur'ān] as a metaphor (*mathal*). The community's people of learning [the shaykhs and Imāms] know its [the metaphor's] explanation; nevertheless, some of the learned have said:

The meaning of His saying, May Allāh be magnified and glorified, is:

«[T]hey certainly did not kill him. No! God raised him up to Himself»

Truly, what it means to them [Jews and Christians] is that even if they were claiming that they had killed Him, then truly, He is alive; Allah raised Him to Him, and He is near Allah--joyful, honoured, delighted--because He is a martyr (*shahīd*), and martyrs are alive near Allah, as Allah describes them as being with Him. Then the Great and Mighty declared:

«Do not say that those who are killed in God's cause are dead; they are alive, though you do not realize it. (Q. 2.154)»

In another verse, He said:

«[Prophet], do not think of those who have been killed in God's way as dead. They are alive with their Lord, well provided for, happy with what God has given them of His favour; rejoicing that for those they have left behind who have yet to join them there is no fear, nor will they grieve; (Q. 3.169-70)»

He [Abū Ḥātim] said:

Then it is so for the way of the Messiah, peace be upon Him, they did not kill Him for certain; meaning they did not kill Him. In actuality, because He is a martyr, Allah raised Him to Him, and He is alive near Him--joyfully delighted.⁷⁵⁰

While Rhazes says that the Qur'an opposes what the Jews and Christians say about the killing of the Messiah, there could be confusion about whether he is referring to what Jews and Christians of his day were saying, what had been reported in *ḥadīths* that would have been considered *Isrā'īliyyāt*, or what was contained in the Gospels. Abū Ḥātim responds as if Rhazes is referring to the

⁷⁵⁰ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, 131.

Gospels and he does not argue that the Qur'an is correct and the Gospels are incorrect. After identifying the Christians as 'the people of God' and the Jews as 'the people of Satan,' it would have been quite difficult to argue that 'the people of God' conspired with 'the people of Satan' to alter the Christian Gospels, so he does not argue that the Gospels are corrupted (*tahrīf*). In fact, he treats the Gospels as authoritative sources of truth. Abū Ḥātim portrays Jesus as being alive in spirit in the Kingdom of Heaven, having been saved from sin and hell.

As in the Gospel (*al-injīl*) according to John's Good News (*bushrā*):

The Messiah died in the body (*al-jasad*), but He is alive in the spirit (*al-rūḥ*).⁷⁵¹

So, they thought that He Who died in the body was saved from sin.⁷⁵²

In Luke's Good News (*bushrā*):

For I say to you: O my friends! Do not fear those who can kill the body, but are not able beyond that. I tell you whom you must fear, Him Who kills the body (*al-jasad*) and has authority to throw it into hell-fire.⁷⁵³ I say to you for certain, Truly, I will go to the Kingdom of Heaven.⁷⁵⁴ This is My body, sacrificed to death for your sake; so

⁷⁵¹ The closest account in John's Gospel is: "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit." (John 19:30 ESV)

⁷⁵² The allusion to saving from sin is found in: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

⁷⁵³ "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:4-5)

⁷⁵⁴ This may not be from Luke's Gospel.

therefore, all of you do this in remembrance of Me whenever you meet.⁷⁵⁵

In Matthew's Good News (*bushrā*):

What you heard with your ears, proclaim it over the earth.⁷⁵⁶ Do not fear those who kill the body (*al-jasad*), but are not able to kill the soul (*al-nafs*), but fear Him who can damn the soul (*al-nafs*) and banish the body (*al-jasad*) into the fire.⁷⁵⁷

The terms 'soul' (*nafs*) and 'spirit' (*rūḥ*) warrant a few comments. Since Abū Ḥātim states that Christians have been misled into saying that Jesus is the Son of God, it is unlikely that he equates either 'soul' or 'spirit' with Jesus' *lāhūt* (divine nature); he argues rather that the soul is an immaterial entity that is part of each person's *nāsūt* (human nature). In fact, the passages he cites from Matthew and Luke concern the souls of ordinary people, not Jesus' soul in particular. Abū Ḥātim treats 'soul' and 'spirit' as synonyms. His translation of John 19:30 does not exactly accord with any standard translation of the Gospel account, rather, the following three Gospel verses show Jesus 'yielding,' 'committing,' and 'giving up' His spirit, rather than being alive in the spirit:

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.
(Matthew 27:50)

⁷⁵⁵ "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."
(Luke 22:19-20)

⁷⁵⁶ "[T]eaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:20)

⁷⁵⁷ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, 131-2; 'And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.' (Matthew 10:28)

Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit My spirit!' And having said this He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)

When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished,' and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:30)

Abū Ḥātim does not explain the significance of the immortality of Jesus'

soul or spirit. His point seems to be that the way in which Jesus remains alive with Allah is that his soul or spirit remains alive after His body has died. The physician-philosopher Rhazes only believes in what he can see or what he knows through reason and since he cannot observe Jesus' immaterial soul and cannot rationally prove its existence, the distinction that Abū Ḥātim makes between Jesus' body and soul would not have swayed Rhazes or his sympathisers.

The earliest known Arabic translation of the Gospels has been dated

284/897.⁷⁵⁸ Therefore, Abū Ḥātim was among the first generation of Arabic-

⁷⁵⁸Sidney H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: An Inquiry into its Appearance in the First 'Abbāsid Century" *Oriens Christianus* 69 (1985), 126-167 esp. 132 where Griffith reports "The oldest, dated manuscript containing the Gospels in Arabic is Sinai Arabic MS 72. Here the text of the four canonical Gospels is marked off according to lessons of the temporal cycle of the Greek liturgical calendar of the Jerusalem church. A colophon informs us that the MS was written by Stephen of Ramleh in the year 284 of the Arabs, i.e., in 897 A.D." Griffith's footnote mentions that "the published photograph of this colophon [is found] in Constance E. Padwick, "Al-Ghazali and the Arabic Versions of the Gospels", *Moslem World* (1939), pp. 134ff. Hikmat Kashouh, *The Arabic versions of the Gospels: the manuscripts and their families* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2012), 10.1 Conclusion proffers an earlier date for another manuscript. 'This study suggests that the Gospels could have been first translated into Arabic in either the sixth or early seventh century. If future

speakers who had access to the Gospel accounts in Arabic. It is therefore impressive that he was not only familiar with the Gospels, but that he was able to argue from them apologetically. Nonetheless, while Abū Ḥātim argues that the Qur'an portrays a raising of only Jesus' soul at the time of the crucifixion, an informed audience would have known that the Gospels provide accounts of Jesus rising from the dead three days after His crucifixion (Matthew 28:1-11, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12 and John 20:1-10) and then an ascension (another raising) of both His soul and His resurrected body forty days later (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:6-11). In fact, since Abū Ḥātim cites the very last verse of Matthew's Gospel, one might wonder whether he noticed that the previous twenty-nine verses document Jesus' burial, His guarded tomb, His resurrection, and the bribing of the guards, all of which occurred after Jesus' crucifixion. While the Gospel accounts document God's raising of Jesus' dead body back to life three days after the crucifixion and then raising Him to heaven forty days later, the silence of Abū Ḥātim regarding timing implies that the raising is contemporaneous with Jesus' crucifixion.

Abū Ḥātim concludes by arguing that the Gospel and the Qur'an are compatible because both argue that Allah raised Jesus and that Jesus remains alive.

scholars are motivated to study this claim further, they should give particular attention to Vatican, Ar. 13.' In an email dated 2 October 2009, Imad Shehadeh dated this particular manuscript to the eighth century.

This is what is in the Gospel; it is compatible with what is in the Qur'ān in this sense. The Messiah, peace be upon Him, has said truly He sacrificed His body to death and that He went to the Kingdom of Allah. He said: 'They killed the body, but they are not able to kill the soul.' This saying is compatible with what the mighty and exalted Allah said in the Qur'ān:

«they certainly did not kill him— No! God raised him up to Himself.»

The Great and Mighty declared in the other verse proclaiming the Messiah, peace be upon Him:

«Jesus, I will cause you to die and raise you up to Me: (Q. 3.55)»

In another verse, He told a story about the Messiah, peace be upon Him:

«...I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since you took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them:... (Q. 5.117)»

...The mighty and exalted Allah indicates that He took Him (Jesus) when He withdrew from them. So the Qur'ān agrees with the Gospel that Allah took Him and raised Him to Him and that He is alive near Allah. This meaning is correct from the Qur'ān and the Gospel; the claim of the 'infidel' that the Qur'ān differs from the Gospel in this affair is worthless.⁷⁵⁹

The debate is summarised in three paragraphs in which the argument of

Abū Ḥātim progresses in three phases. Citing three Qur'anic verses (Q. 4.157-8, 2.154, and 3.169-70), he argues that the Jews did not really kill Jesus, because martyrs like Jesus are alive near Allah. Citing six verses from three Gospels (John 19:30, Matthew 1:21, 10:28, and 28:20, Luke 12:4-5 and 22:19), he argues that it was Jesus' body and not his soul/spirit that had been crucified. Citing three Qur'anic verses (Q. 4.157-8, 3.55, and 5.117), he argues that the Qur'an and the Gospels are compatible because both teach that Allah raised Jesus to heaven where He is a witness against those who had crucified His body.

⁷⁵⁹ Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, 132.

Abū Ḥātim sketches an outline of Rhazes' objection to the Qur'an in the eighth paragraph. Rhazes argues that since the Qur'an contradicts the testimony of the Jews and the Christians concerning Jesus' crucifixion, the Qur'an cannot be trusted. Abū Ḥātim says that the Qur'an is correct and that its figurative meaning is understood only by the Imāms. He focuses on the idea that Jesus is alive with Allah rather than on whether He was crucified.

11.2.1.3 Observations

In response to Rhazes' argument that Christian sayings combined with reason prove that the Qur'an is worthless, Abū Ḥātim argues that because the Qur'an conforms to the Gospels, it is Rhazes' reasoning that is worthless. Not only does Abū Ḥātim cite Luke 22:19, which includes the highly significant theological term 'sacrifice'; he also uses the term in his final paragraph. What is most noteworthy about this debate is not that the disputants disagreed about their interpretation of the Qur'an, but they agreed that Jesus had been crucified. Abū Ḥātim also affirms that Jesus' sacrificial crucifixion made Him a martyr and a witness after He rose and ascended. He acknowledges that Jesus had commanded His followers to observe communion (by quoting Luke's Good News above) and the Great Commission (by quoting Matthew's Good News above). Abū Ḥātim unequivocally confirms the position of Rhazes that Jesus had been crucified:

This is what is in the Gospel; it is compatible with what is in the Qur'ān in this sense. The Messiah, peace be upon Him, has said that He sacrificed His body to death.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁶⁰*Ibid.*

11.3 Discussion

Ibn al-Rāwandī does not argue for Jesus' crucifixion, but rather he argues that because of the vast array of reports concerning Jesus' crucifixion and the small handful of reports concerning Muhammad's miracles, rejecting Jesus' crucifixion logically entails rejecting Muhammad's prophethood. Even though al-Shīrāzī repeatedly argues for Allah's special treatment of Jesus with abundant provisions after His death, he does not explicitly argue for or against Jesus' crucifixion.

Abū Ḥātim argues that the Qur'an confirms the accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus contained in the Gospels. In fact, he goes so far as to say that the body of Jesus was offered as a sacrifice. What is most important to see from this section is that Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Ḥātim and Rhazes appear to unconditionally affirm the actual crucifixion of Jesus.

Chapter 12-Anti-Christian polemical works (246/860-505/1111)

12.1 *Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī* (d. 246/860)

12.1.1 Background

Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā‘īl Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib al-Rassī (d. 246/860) was born in Medina in 169/785. He learned *ḥadīth* and Zaydī doctrine from his father and studied Christian scriptures, theology and philosophical treatises during his eleven years in Fuṣṭāṭ. He then purchased an estate near Medina where he founded a legal and theological school and taught Zaydī students from Kūfa, Yemen and Ṭabaristān. He developed a theology that combined elements of Christianity and of Mu‘tazilism. His teaching had a lasting effect on Zaydīs in Ṭabaristān and Yemen. Through the efforts of his grandson al-Hādī ila’l-Ḥaqq (d. 298/911), later Zaydī doctrine more closely approximated Mu‘tazilī thinking.⁷⁶¹ He argued that the Christian doctrines of the hypostatic union and the Trinity were not reasonable.⁷⁶² Following is a translation of the portion of *‘Alā l-Naṣārā* in which al-Qāsim al-Rassī discusses the crucifixion of Jesus.

12.1.2 Translation and analysis of what al-Qāsim al-Rassī says in his *‘Alā l-Naṣārā* about the crucifixion

They said that the Son purchased mankind from His Father by suffering and crucifixion...He ascended to heaven after... 40 days had passed... They said that He sits at the right hand of the Father with... all of that which is in the

⁷⁶¹W. Madelung, “al- Rassī, al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm b. Ismā‘īl Ibrāhīm b. al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,” *EI*²; date from W. Madelung, “al-Ḥādī Ila’l-Ḥaqq,” *EI*².

⁷⁶²Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 7.

divine nature (*lāhūt*) and human nature (*nāsūt*) and all those attributes which are in both and belong to both [of these natures]. They said that He will also descend once more to judge the living and the dead at the destruction of the world. They therefore said: We believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. They said: the Father is He who has created things by His Son and has protected them through His Holy Spirit.⁷⁶³

12.1.3 Observations

Since this passage was written during the stay of al-Rassī in Egypt from 199/815 to 211/821, it is probably the earliest evidence examined in this thesis that Muslim scholars were familiar with the Aramaic Christian theological terms *lāhūt* and *nāsūt*. The six times that al-Rassī writes ‘they say’ as well as the one occasion when he writes ‘they allege’ shows that this is a polemical work. These phrases are used in order to point out what Christians believe so that he can then argue against those very beliefs. By no means can the phrase ‘the Son purchased mankind from his Father by His suffering crucifixion’ be separated from ‘they say’ without doing violence to authorial intent.

Nonetheless, Lawson states that al-Qāsim al-Rassī affirmed Jesus’ crucifixion as follows:

The influential scholar and jurist al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 246/860), founder of the Yemeni Zaydī legal *madhhab*, upheld the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus. The precise details of his teaching on this topic are as yet unclear. But there seems to be no compelling reason to doubt that he understood the Qur’an as *not* denying that the historical Jesus was actually

⁷⁶³ Arabic text of ‘*Alā l-Naṣārā*’ in I. di Matteo, “Confutazione contro i cristiani dello zaudita Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm,” *RSO* IX (1922): 317-8.

put on the cross and crucified. In one passage he explains and justifies the crucifixion of Jesus as a ‘ransom to God’. This indicates that a study of the image and discussion of Jesus in specifically Zaydi literature is likely to yield interesting results [Lawson’s emphasis].⁷⁶⁴

Lawson identifies the source of his thinking as the *EI*² article entitled *al-Ṣalīb* (the cross) by A.J. Wensinck, the pertinent part of which reads as follows:

In the early 3rd/9th century the Zaydī imām Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī explains the crucifixion briefly as a ransom to God (I. di Matteo, *Confutazione contro i Cristiani dello Zaydīto al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm*, in *RSO*, ix [1922] 317) but does not discuss it further.⁷⁶⁵

Wensinck did not word his *EI*² article in a manner that reflected the intention of the author nor did Lawson explain what al-Qāsim al-Rassī meant.

Lawson is certainly correct to say that ‘This indicates that a study of the image and discussion of Jesus in specifically Zaydi literature is likely to yield interesting results’. The interesting result of the study in this thesis is that the statement of al-Qāsim al-Rassī is the foil of an argument, not an affirmation of the crucifixion of Jesus. It is precisely the opposite of what Lawson argues.

⁷⁶⁴Lawson, 77, 77 n. 22.

⁷⁶⁵A.J. Wensinck, “al- Ṣalīb,” *EI*².

12.2 The pseudo al-Ghazālī work entitled ‘al-Radd al-jamīl’ (d. 505/1111)

12.2.1 Background

Since the background of al-Ghazālī is well-known, no biography is presented here. Since the authenticity of *al-Radd al-jamīl* makes little difference in this argument, it is referred to as ‘pseudo’ here. The translation of the portion of *al-Radd al-jamīl* that discusses the crucifixion of Jesus is presented immediately.

12.2.2 Translation and analysis

Such a problem as this cannot be handled whilst supporting that which is not demonstrated by sure proofs, especially when it concerns a person whose human nature is proven by [His possessing] its necessary attributes, its attachments and its inherent animal characteristics such as speech, fatigue, hunger, thirst, sleep, being enclosed in the womb, and - according to their opinion about the crucifixion – feeling pain, when he said,

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

So, all these deny (His) divinity. This is how that is denied in Mark’s gospel:

On the following day, they left Bethany. He was hungry and saw a fig tree from afar with leaves on it. He went to it seeking fruit on it. Then when he came to it, He did not find a thing on it except only leaves, for it was not the season for figs. [Mark 11:12-3]

It is clear in this text, that He (Jesus) experienced hunger and that He assumed the thing opposite of what it [actually] was, because He thought it had fruit on it, but He thought wrong. He thought that the time was the time of figs or he thought that it was bearing fruit outside of the time of figs. Both of these [possibilities] were untrue.⁷⁶⁶

Pseudo al-Ghazālī later mentions the following:

⁷⁶⁶ Arabic text of *al-Radd al-jamīl* in Robert Chidiac, *Réfutation Excellente de la Divinité de Jésus-Christ D’après les Évangiles [al-Radd al-jamīl]* (Paris: University of France Presses, 1939), 17-18.

John has explained about that in his Gospel, when He (Jesus) said and implored God on the night before the crucifixion - according to their opinion-:

If it is possible, take this cup away from me.

He also said when He was crucified - according to their opinion -:

Eli, Eli lama sabachthani.

These Hebrew words mean:

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?⁷⁶⁷

Pseudo al-Ghazālī conflates the entreaty about the cup that Jesus prayed about in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:39, Mark 14:36 & Luke 22:42) with one of His sayings on the cross (Matt 26:46 & Mark 15:34). John's Gospel is the only Gospel that does not deal with either of these. *Eli, Eli lama sabachthani* are Aramaic words, not Hebrew words.

12.2.3 Observations

Lawson argues that pseudo al-Ghazālī affirms the crucifixion:

In an important article published in 1932, Louis Massignon brought attention to what might be thought a somewhat anomalous instance of the great 'renewer of religion' (*mujaddid*), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, affirming the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus. The authorship of the particular work in which this affirmation occurs, *al-Radd al-Jamīl*, has long been disputed, some preferring to ascribe it to one of al-Ghazālī's students, and has recently become once again the topic of vigorous scholarly debate. But there is still no completely compelling reason to fully doubt al-Ghazālī's authorship. Even if there were, the important point in this context is that such a work could have been read by generations of scholars as representing the views of al-Ghazālī. This has not been sufficiently appreciated in scholarship on the 'Muslim Jesus'. The question emerges: what occurred between the death of the great Sunni exegete al-Ṭabarī (923 CE) and the death of al-Ghazālī (1111 CE), the great Sunni theologian, to

⁷⁶⁷ Arabic text of *al-Radd al-jamīl* in Chidiac, *Réfutation*, 22-23.

allow or cause such a startling reversal in understanding of our verse to occur?

Massignon's conclusion was that al-Ghazālī, in the process of studying the writings of one of his main theological opponents, namely the Isma'ili preachers and intellectuals from Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933–4) to Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 471/1078), had become persuaded of the correctness of some of their beliefs. As Massignon points out, al-Ghazālī had been studying these works long before his sojourn in Jerusalem and Alexandria (ca. 1095–7) and it was already widely known by this time that the Isma'ili-inspired *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (tenth century) taught that Jesus had really been crucified.⁷⁶⁸

Pseudo-al-Ghazālī is a work of Alexandria. There is no compelling reason to believe that the staunchly Sunnī al-Ghazālī visited Fāṭimid Alexandria or wrote it. The fact that pseudo al-Ghazālī twice conditions his statements with 'according to their opinion about the crucifixion' makes clear that this is a polemical work and that he does not affirm Jesus' crucifixion. Even the title of his book identifies itself as a polemic work. The actual position of al-Ghazālī concerning Jesus' crucifixion is found in his *Kitāb al-mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl* that is presented in Chapter 13.3.

12.3 Observations on the crucifixion of Jesus as depicted in anti-Christian polemical works

The language in the works of al-Qāsim al-Rassī and of Pseudo al-Ghazālī makes it clear that they are anti-Christian polemical treatises. They do not affirm the crucifixion. In fact, the selections cited by Lawson present the foil of the argument against which the authors later argue.

⁷⁶⁸Lawson, 77–78.

Chapter 13-Is it possible for Allah to cast the likeness of Jesus onto another man convincingly? (303/916-606/1210)

The idea that the Jews were confused about the identity of the one whom they crucified on the cross of Jesus seems to have originated with Muqātil b. Sulaymān al-Balkhī (d. 150-1/767). Yet, there is some confusion about that commentary. Based on the *Beyazit Umumi* MS 561 of the *tafsīr*, Lawson states that:

Muqātil adds that the Jews were also unsure of the true identity of the one they were killing, and relates this nicely to the commentary on THEY DID NOT KILL HIM/IT IN, CERTAINTY by saying that the Jews did not kill the victim in absolute certainty.⁷⁶⁹

However, the published *tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān is a legal commentary, with an *isnād* tracing it to the eleventh century, not the eighth century, which does not comment on Q. 4.157. This published *tafsīr* is based on MS. Or 6333 in the British Library, which indicates that it was copied by Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Junaynī in 792/1390 and is thought by Goldfeld to be the only extant copy.⁷⁷⁰

Nonetheless, it is thought that Muqātil and others transmitted reports that said that Allah had cast the likeness of Jesus onto another man and that that

⁷⁶⁹ Lawson, 60-1; Lawson translated portions of the *Beyazit Umumi* MS 561 of the *tafsīr* possibly before the published edition became available. The Bayezid Mosque is in the center of the old walled city of Istanbul.

⁷⁷⁰ Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Kitāb tafsīr al-khams mi'at āya min al-Qur'ān*, ed. Isaiah Goldfeld (Shafā 'Amr: Al-Mashriq Press, 1980), 3-6; it even retains original orthography with *hamza* oddities and lacking the *alif maqṣūrā*.

likeness appeared to be so similar to Jesus that the Jews had mistakenly crucified that man instead of Jesus.

Substitution legends posed three problems for the rational and just Mu'tazilīs. It would be unjust for Allah to punish an innocent man in place of Jesus; it would be ironic to punish an innocent man in order to save the innocent Jesus from punishment; it would be irrational for Allah to be the author of confusion.⁷⁷¹ The leading Mu'tazilī of his day, al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/916), asks whether it is possible for Allah to do the ethically bad thing of deceiving both the Jews and the Christians. Al-Ṭūsī (d. 459-60/1066-7), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) respond to that question.⁷⁷²

⁷⁷¹ Ayoub, *Christology*, II, 102.

⁷⁷² Surprisingly, al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), who repeats much of the commentary of al-Ṭūsī, does not repeat or respond to this question.

13.1 Al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/916)

Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb b. Salām b. Khālīd b. Humrān b.

Abbān al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/916) was born in Jubbā in Khūzistān in 235/849-50. After studying under the principal Mu'tazilī Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Shaḥḥām (d. 257/871) in Baṣra, al-Jubbā'ī succeeded him as one of the most important Mu'tazilī teachers during the period after the caliph Mutawakkil (d. 247/861) ended the *miḥna* in 235/850. Al-Jubbā'ī moved to Baghdad around 258/872 and then before 276/890, he moved to 'Askar Mukram in Khūzistān for the rest of his life. His two best known students were his son, 'Abd al-Salām Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933), and Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935-6). After al-Ash'arī left the Mu'tazilīs to start his competing theological school, he heckled al-Jubbā'ī in his public lectures. Abū Hāshim, who was 'a celebrated scholastic theologian, a learned doctor [and]... one of the principal heads of the' Mu'tazilīs, was in fact, the last Mu'tazilī accepted by Sunnis before the rise of Ash'arī *kalām*.⁷⁷³

Al-Jubbā'ī wrote seventy works including a book advocating the createdness of the Qur'an, a book explaining the *mutashābihāt* of the Qur'an, and a 2,600 page

⁷⁷³ Ibn Kh., deSl., II, 132-3, 669-71; *Anth.* 590; *Elr*; L. Gardet, "al-DJubbā'ī, Abū 'Alī Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb," *Elr*²; Ignaz Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators*, ed. and tr. Wolfgang H. Behn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 85-6; dates obtained from D. Gimaret, "al-SHAḥḥām, Abu Ya'qūb Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ishāq," *Elr*²; H. Kennedy, "al-Mutawakkil 'Alā 'llāh, Abu 'l-Faḍl DJa'far b. Muḥammad," *Elr*²; W. Montgomery Watt, "al-Ash'arī, Abu'l-Ḥasan, 'Alī b. Ismā'īl," *Elr*².

tafsīr. None of the writings of al-Jubbā'ī or his son, not even the refutations that al-Jubbā'ī propounded against the work of Ibn al-Rāwandī, remain extant, so the contributions of al-Jubbā'ī can only be seen through the works of later scholars. The work of al-Jubbā'ī and Abū Hāshim came to have a profound influence on the Shī'ī Būyid princes Mu'ayyid al-Dawla (d. 373/984) and Fakhr al-Dawla (d. 412/1021) as well as on the philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and the Twelver commentator Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). The polemical work of al-Jubbā'ī was also quite influential, but he misrepresented the doctrine of the Trinity by calling Jesus and the Holy Spirit attributes of Allāh, rather than persons. His attacks against the incarnation and the Trinity are so important that they influenced Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī. The writings of al-Jubbā'ī were the primary source for 'Abd al-Jabbār b. Ahmad al-Hamadhānī who repeats them at length. Ibn Khallikān reports that he was 'the first dogmatic theologian of the age'.⁷⁷⁴ Al-Jubbā'ī asked whether it is conceivable that Allah could cast the image of Jesus onto another man.

⁷⁷⁴*Fihrist*, 76, 80, 83; *Elr.*; Gardet, "al-D̲jubbā'ī"; Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 25-6, 39 n.4.; 132n. 35, 155n.15, 210, 213-5, 218, 222-3, 227n.2, 239n.29, 255n.43, 257n.46, 259n.51 and 53, 283n.83, 299n.120, 323n.154, 333, 337, 353n. 189; Bruce Fudge, *Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: Al-Ṭabrisī and the craft of commentary* (London: Routledge, 2011), 115; dates obtained from C.E. Bosworth, "Mu'ayyid al-Dawla, Abū Maṣṣūr Būya b. Rukn al-Dawla Ḥasan," *El²*; K.V. Zetterstéen, "ṢḤamsal-Dawla, Abū Ṭāhir b. Fakhr al-Dawla Ḥasan," *El²*; A.M. Goichon, "Ibn Sīnā," *El²*; H. Daiber, "al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn", *El²*. Quote attributable to Ibn Kh., deSl., II-671.

13.2 Al-Ṭūsī (d. 459-60/1066-7)

13.2.1 Background

The first scholar to respond to the question raised by al-Jubbā'ī was Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 459-60/1066-7). He was born in Ṭūs in Ghaznawid Shāfi'ī Khurasan in 385/995 where he first studied. He moved to Shī'ī Būyid Baghdad in 408/1017 where he was influenced by leading Twelver and Mu'tazilī tutors and became the capital's principal theologian under the patronage of the Būyids. He led the Twelvers from 436/1044 when the 'Abbāsid caliph al-Qā'im (r. 422/1031-467/1075) appointed him chair of theology and gave him most of the 180,000 works in the Twelver libraries (the *dār al-'ilm* [house of knowledge] of Sābūr b. Ardashīr and al-Murtaḍa), which he utilised in writing fifty books. In 448/1058, the Ḥanbalī Traditionists burned his home and library, so he moved to Najaf for the rest of his life.⁷⁷⁵

Rather than only relying on *ḥadīth* like the *ahl al-ḥadīth* did, al-Ṭūsī incorporated reason and the idea that jurist-theologians represent the Twelfth Imām, earning him the title *Shaykh al-ṭā'ifa al-imāmiyya*. He studied under both rationalist and Traditionist scholars. Al-Ṭūsī compiled two collections of *ḥadīth* attributable to Imāms that together constitute half of the 'four books' of the

⁷⁷⁵ *Anth.* 599; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan," *El*²; Andrew J. Newman, "Tusi, Al-, Muhammad Ibn Hasan", *MIC*, 839.

Twelvers. His *Al-tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* was the first great Twelver commentary.⁷⁷⁶

That commentary includes the following interpretation of Q. 4.157 in which the portions that have also been translated by Lawson and Thomas are footnoted.

13.2.2 Translation and analysis of what *Al-tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* of al-Ṭūsī says about Q. 4.157

This verse is attached to what preceded it and is appraising it [what precedes it] because of their [the Jews] breaching their covenant, their disbelieving the signs of Allāh, their killing prophets unlawfully, their saying:

«Our minds are closed (Q. 4.155)»

and their saying,

«And [they] said, ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’»

We inflicted punishment and We imposed obstacles for them, because of their report that they [have] killed the Messiah for certain. They have not killed Him--it is blasphemy--it is audacity against Allah to kill [any of] His prophets, the truth of whose [prophethood] has been proven [by His] miracles. Killing His prophets and those who prove miracles, in addition to His truth, is unbelief, [and] as such, it is audacity against Allāh. Allāh accused them of lying in their saying:

«We have killed Him»,

and then He said:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them».⁷⁷⁷

Al-Ṭūsī is the only commentator in our sample who places this verse within the context of verses 153-6, wherein the Jews demonstrate their unbelief in a

⁷⁷⁶Amir-Moezzi, “al-Ṭūsī”; *Anth.* 599; Newman, “Tusi”, 839; Christopher Melchert, “Hadith”, *MIC*, 307.

⁷⁷⁷Shaykh al-Ṭāʾifa Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Shawḳī and ʿĀmilī (Najaf: Maktabat al-amīn/al-Maṭbaʿat al-ʿilmiyya, 1376/1957), 382.

variety of ways and Allah punishes them more than once. Next, al-Ṭūsī contrasts the truthfulness of Allah with the deception of the Jews. Al-Ṭūsī then states that while the Jews generally agree, they do differ in a variety of particulars, which he explains through nine *ḥādīths*.

Wahb b. Munabbih said:

Jesus and seventeen of the disciples with Him approached a house. Then, when they [the Jews] surrounded them [Jesus and His disciples] and they [the Jews] entered upon them [Jesus and His disciples], Allāh caused the form of Jesus to fall upon all of them [the disciples]. They [the Jews] said to them [Jesus and His disciples]:

You [have] practiced sorcery against us. Let Jesus come out to us or we will kill all of you.

And Jesus said to His disciples:

Who among you will sell himself today for Paradise?

A man amongst them said:

I [will].

Then he went out to them, and he said:

I am Jesus.

Allāh had caused the form of Jesus to fall on [him] and then they [the Jews] took him and killed him and crucified him. Then, for that reason [because they killed a volunteer who looked like Jesus], they became confused. They [the Jews] thought that they had killed Jesus and the Christians also thought that he [the volunteer] was Jesus, but Allāh had raised Jesus on that day.⁷⁷⁸

Wahb reports that all seventeen disciples who were with Jesus in the house were made to take on Jesus' appearance. The Jews accused Jesus and His disciples of practicing sorcery because Allah had transformed all of them into the form of Jesus, but their accusation should have been directed against Allah. Then Jesus

⁷⁷⁸Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 382.

offered the reward of Paradise for whoever would tell the Jews that he was Jesus and endure the crucifixion in His place. Although the Jews might have been confused, there is no place for uncertainty among the disciples since they were keenly aware of how Allah and Jesus had deceived the Jews.

Qatāda [d. 117/735]⁷⁷⁹ and al-Saddī and Ibn Ishāq [d. 105/767]⁷⁸⁰ and Mujāhid [d. 245/859-324/936]⁷⁸¹ and Ibn Jurayj said:

They (the reports) differ in the number of disciples [and] no one, other than Wahb, mentions that His likeness was cast upon all of them; on the contrary they said:

His likeness was cast upon [only] one [of the disciples] and Jesus was raised from amongst them.⁷⁸²

These five different transmitters say that substitution legends differ in two ways, that the number of disciples varies and that although Wahb reports the image of Jesus had been cast upon all of the disciples, all of the others reported that the image had been cast upon a single disciple.

Ibn Ishāq said:

The name of him upon whom His likeness was cast was Sergius. He was one of the disciples and he said:

Truly, [I am] the one who showed them to Him and said:

⁷⁷⁹Ch. Pellat, “Qatāda b. Di‘āma b. qatāda al-sadūsī, abu’l-khaṭṭāb,” *El*². Abu’l-Khaṭṭāb Qatāda b. Di‘āma was a blind Successor, a Mu‘tazilī and a Qur’anic commentator.

⁷⁸⁰J.M.B. Jones, “Ibn Ishāq, Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār b. Kḥiyār,” *El*². Ibn Ishāq was a transmitter of stories of the prophets and the author of one of Muḥammad’s biographies.

⁷⁸¹J. Robson, “Ibn Muḍjāhid, Aḥmad b. Mūsā b. al-‘Abbās Abū Bakr al-Tamīmī,” *El*². Ibn Mujāhid standardised the seven reading of the Qur’ān.

⁷⁸²Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 382-3.

This is Jesus.

[he continues by providing a contradictory report that] The one amongst the disciples of Jesus [who] took those thirty dirhams for that and [who] was a hypocrite and then regretted that and choked [himself] until he killed himself was named Judas (*Būdis Zakarīyā Būṭā*), and he is cursed among the Christians.

One of the Christians said:⁷⁸³

Judas Iscariot is the one who was made a likeness for them, so they crucified him. He [Judas] said:

Am I not your companion who pointed you to Him?⁷⁸⁴

Al-Ṭabarī said:

The soundest [of these reports] is the saying of Ibn al-Munabbih [the first report mentioned above] and that is that the likeness of Jesus was cast upon seventeen of their group...When His likeness was cast upon their group, then everyone saw the form of Jesus. Then when they killed one of them, [the situation became] obscure to them.

After al-Ṭūsī accepts the judgment of al-Ṭabarī that the report of Wahb is to be

most trusted, al-Ṭūsī takes up the question asked by al-Jubbā'ī:

Al-Jubbā'ī said:

The point of confusion for the leaders of the Jews is [that] they took a man and then killed and crucified him on a high place. They did not allow anyone to access his [body], then his appearance was altered and his form was changed beyond recognition. They [the Jews] said:

We killed Jesus.

By that [statement] they misled their ordinary [people. This is] because when they had surrounded the house in which Jesus was [present] and entered it, Jesus had been raised from amongst them [and because] they were afraid that [Jesus' ascension] would cause faith among the Jews, so they did that [they misled their ordinary

⁷⁸³ A single unnamed Christian, apparently without credibility.

⁷⁸⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 383.

people]. Those who crucified Him were not those who disagreed about it. The rest of the Jews asked:

Is it conceivable that Allāh could cast the likeness of Zayd upon ‘Āmir so that the eye could not distinguish between both of them as it could distinguish before the casting of the likeness?⁷⁸⁵

[al-Ṭūsī] said:

...It is conceivable that He [Jesus] performed that miracle or [that] Allāh performed a miracle through a saint or [that] Allāh allowed a miracle to happen to a saint, because some of His helpers are virtuous or [because] the [consensus of the] community is infallible. In the opinion of the Mu‘tazilīs, it is not conceivable [that Allāh would cast the image or likeness of one man onto another] except at the hands of the prophets or during their time, because going beyond what is ordinary is not conceivable for them, except at His [Allāh’s] hands.⁷⁸⁶

The [reports transmitted by the] Christians resemble one another, therefore, I say:

How is it conceivable that important people told something other than what is [true]? The multitudes of Jews and Christians have taught us, and their multitudes have reported that Jesus was crucified and killed. So, how is it conceivable that liars were within their multitude? For, if this is conceivable, [then] we [can] not trust any original report...[It is conceivable because] those people (the

⁷⁸⁵ Lawson, 92 translates this as: The meaning of the error (*wajh al-tashbīh*) is that the leaders of the Jews took a man, killed him and crucified him on a hill. They prevented anyone from examining him until his body had decomposed beyond recognition. Then they claimed they had killed Jesus; thus they misled their people because they were afraid that if the Jews knew that Jesus had been raised by God from the house that they had entered in order to arrest him, that this divine intervention would cause the Jews to believe in Jesus. Those who crucified this man were not the ones who disagreed about it. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 361n. 202 reads ‘al-Jubbā’ī says that the Jews crucified another in Jesus’ place, and since the witnesses were some distance from the place of execution they could not know this, while after his death his features would have been too distorted to make him recognizable;’ citing Gimaret, *Lecture mu‘tazilite*, 252-3.

⁷⁸⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 383.

eyewitnesses) became uncertain, because the Jews did not know Jesus. [They] only reported that they killed [someone], and they told them that he was Jesus. In that, they are honest... Because His image was cast upon another [man], when they saw that he was in the form of the killed one, they thought that he was Jesus. Neither of the two parties told [anyone] about [their] doubt in the affair... That does not lead to invaliding [all eyewitness] reports, under any circumstances.

«those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him»

means, [those] who surrounded Jesus and His disciples were those [who] wanted to kill Him. Because they knew many [disciples] were in the house when they entered upon them and found one of them, the affair of Jesus was confusing to them. They found one of the many [disciples] and killed the one whom they killed, [but they] doubted the affair of Jesus. This is the view of those who said:

His disciples did not scatter until the Jews entered upon them and said:

Scatter from Him. [echoes of Matthew 26:31]

Then he said:

Their difference [of opinion concerns whether] Jesus was among those who remained in the house or [whether] He was among those who left. They became confused about the affair.⁷⁸⁷

This is the part of the commentary that is important to the context of this thesis. Al-Ṭūsī says that al-Jubbā'ī said that the Jewish leadership intentionally deceived their ordinary people by crucifying someone else and keeping the ordinary people at such a distance that they could not recognize the distorted figure upon the cross. Al-Ṭūsī says that al-Jubbā'ī said that the rest of the Jews raised the important question of whether it is conceivable that Allāh could cast the

⁷⁸⁷Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 384.

image of one person upon another so that they became indistinguishable from one another. Al-Ṭūsī answers by saying that such a thing is only conceivable for the Mu'tazilīs during the time of a prophet, but that the Twelvers can also conceive of such a miracle to or through a saint or because Imāms are virtuous or because the consensus cannot be wrong.

In light of what Muslims had learned from the Jews and the Christians, al-Ṭūsī twice questions whether it is conceivable that the multitude of Jews and Christians are lying, but he excuses the Jews of lying because they did not know Jesus and they only reported what they thought they had seen. He makes a point of stating that the doubt among the multitudes does not invalidate their reports. The affair is confusing because the Jews did not know whether Jesus remained among those in the house or whether He left. Al-Ṭūsī is the first to raise and address this important question that will also be dealt with by al-Ghazālī, and al-Rāzī next.

Al-Zajjāj⁷⁸⁸ said:

The point of difference of the Christians is that among them are those who claimed that He is God [and can] not be killed, and among those who say He was killed. Allāh accused everyone of lying.⁷⁸⁹

Al-Zajjāj reports that the difference is because some Christians believe that Jesus is God and that God cannot be killed, while other Christians believe that Jesus

⁷⁸⁸See separate section on al-Zajjāj.

⁷⁸⁹Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 383-4.

was killed. While the Qur'an accuses the Jews of following conjecture, al-Zajjāj asserts that Allah is accusing them of lying.

Ibn 'Abbās and Juwaybir said:

[This means] they did not know it for certain.

Al-Zajjāj related about their people (*qawmihim*):

The *hu* refers to Jesus. Allāh rescued Him from being killed and this is a point of truth and certainty.⁷⁹⁰

These last three reports continue to focus on the confusion that was introduced by al-Jubbā'ī. Al-Ṭūsī then repeats al-Ṭabarī's assessment of Wahb's account:

The likeness was cast upon all the disciples and thus the matter was obscured for everyone involved.

Al-Ṭūsī states that the Jews who had done the killing were certain that they had not killed Jesus, but rather that the uncertainty was among the general populace whom the leaders had deceived.

13.2.3 Observations

Among all of the scholars considered in Part III, only al-Ṭūsī places Q. 4.157 within the context of the Jewish transgressions found in the preceding four āyas. He then contrasts the truthfulness of Allah with the deception of the Jews and states that while the Jews generally agree, they do differ in a variety of particulars, including the number of companions of Jesus that were present and whether one or all of the disciples of Jesus had been transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Al-

⁷⁹⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 384-5.

Ṭūsī repeats a *ḥadīth* that al-Ṭabarī uses that says that Judas betrayed Jesus and then Serjius was transformed into the likeness of Jesus and was crucified. Al-Ṭūsī also includes a report transmitted by al-Zajjāj that was not in the *tafsīr* of al-Zajjāj.

What is most important for this thesis is that al-Ṭūsī introduces the reasoning and the important question of the now lost scholarship of the Mu'tazilī al-Jubbā'ī. In order to keep the disciples and followers of Jesus from believing in Jesus, the Jewish leaders deceive the common people by crucifying someone whom Allah had transformed into the likeness of Jesus and then they keep the people at a distance until he becomes so unrecognizable that he cannot be identified with certainty. The question is then posed concerning whether it is conceivable that Allah operates outside the laws of nature. Al-Ṭūsī answers by saying that such a thing is only conceivable for the Mu'tazilīs during the time of a prophet, but that the Twelvers can also conceive of such a miracle happening to a saint or because Imāms are virtuous or because the consensus cannot be wrong. Lawson states that:

The question is then posed – whether by al-Ṭūsī or al-Jubbā'ī it is difficult to determine – of whether it is possible for one's likeness to be cast upon another so that the two become indistinguishable.⁷⁹¹

Its placement at the end of a citation from al-Jubbā'ī suggests that this question is rightly attributable to him. Furthermore, al-Jubbā'ī makes it clear that he is

⁷⁹¹Lawson, 93.

reporting a question that had been raised by some of the Jews. Another reason to think that this question was raised by al-Jubbā'ī is explained by Ayoub, who relates this question to important Mu'tazilī doctrines:

The idea that no one actually bore the image of Christ and suffered in his stead may have had its origins in Mu'tazili circles. To the Mu'tazilī, the notion that God could commit acts of injustice, for any reason, was most repugnant. Furthermore, for God to allow such confusion of identity for whatever reason, would be too irrational and therefore inadmissible. Shi'i authors, who had much in common with Mu'tazilī thought, report an interesting *ḥadīth* to this effect on the authority of 'Ali al-Jubba'i (d. 303/915), a well known Mu'tazilī theologian.⁷⁹²

Without naming it, al-Jubbā'ī introduces the principle of *mutawātir* and states that Muslims can still trust *ḥadīth* because the Jews and Christians had made an honest mistake in reporting what they thought they had seen. Al-Jubbā'ī blames the Jewish leaders for deception, while substitution legends state or imply that Allah deceived Christians by casting the image of Jesus upon another person.

⁷⁹² Ayoub, "Christology, II", 102.

13.3 Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

13.3.1 Background

The biography of al-Ghazālī is very well-known to scholars of medieval Islam. It is therefore not necessary to discuss it here. Following is a translation of the portion of the penultimate work of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) by al-Ghazālī, his *Kitāb al-mustaṣfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl*, in which al-Ghazālī explains the reliability of sense perception during the ‘extraordinary time’ of Jesus.

13.3.2 Translation and analysis of the comments that al-Ghazālī makes about the crucifixion in his *Kitāb al-mustaṣfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl*

Now to our topic of the killing of Jesus, peace be upon him, they have been honest in that they witnessed somebody resembling Jesus, peace be upon him, killed,

«though it was made to appear like that to them»

If it was said:

Is the likeness of appearance [between Jesus and His substitute] conceivable? If it is conceivable, then each one of us would have doubt when he saw his wife and his child [thinking that] perhaps, he was made to look like him [someone else].

We say:

If the time was an extraordinary time, [then] the likeness of appearance is conceivable and the time of prophecy is not reliable; it confirms the prophet, may the prayers of Allāh be upon him. That does not require doubt outside that time. There is no disagreement about the power of the Most-High Allāh to transform the staff into a snake in the extraordinary time of confirming the prophet, peace be upon him. Nonetheless, if we take the staff in our time, we would not be afraid of its turning back into a snake; we can trust in the ways of our time.⁷⁹³

⁷⁹³ Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-mustaṣfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl* (Cairo: Būlāq Maṭba‘at al-Amīriyya, 1322-4/1904-6), 139.

13.3.3 Observations

Al-Ghazālī is the second scholar to answer the important question raised by al-Jubbā'ī of whether it is possible for Allah to cast the image of one man upon another in such a convincing manner that the one receiving the image would then be crucified instead of the other. By this time in his life, al-Ghazālī held a high view of knowledge acquired through mystical experience and a low view of knowledge acquired through reason, while here he demonstrates a nuanced understanding of knowledge acquired through sense perception during the extraordinary time of prophets. His argument is that the eyewitnesses ‘were correct in that they witnessed someone resembling Jesus being killed’,⁷⁹⁴ but that those ‘who thought that they saw Jesus crucified were actually in error’.⁷⁹⁵ This was ‘an innocent mistake, rather than a conspiracy to defraud’.⁷⁹⁶ This case of mistaken identity was because miracles are possible during the time of a prophet.⁷⁹⁷ Al-Ghazālī thinks that those who live in ordinary times can trust their senses, but that those who live in the extraordinary times of a prophet, such as when Moses turned a staff into a

⁷⁹⁴ Martin Whittingham, “Al-Ghazālī on Jews and Christian” in *The Three Rings*, ed. B. Roggema, M. Poorthuis, P. Valkenberg (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 206.

⁷⁹⁵ Whittingham, “Al-Ghazālī”, 210.

⁷⁹⁶ Martin Whittingham, “How Could So Many Christians Be Wrong? The Role of *Tawātur* (Recurrent Transmission of Reports) in Understanding Muslim Views of the Crucifixion”, *Islam and Christian—Muslim Relations* 19.2 (April 2008), 173.

⁷⁹⁷ Whittingham, “Al-Ghazālī”, 211.

snake or when Allah protected Jesus from the Jews who wanted to kill Him, that one has to rely on revelation, rather than upon sense perception.

13.4 *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (d. 606/1210)

13.4.1 Background

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is one of the most famous medieval Muslim scholars, so his biography is not included here.

13.4.2 Translation and analysis of the comments that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī makes in his *Kitāb al-tafsīr al-kabīr* about Q. 3.55

The section of the *tafsīr* of al-Rāzī that concerns Q. 3.55 is replete with compelling reasoning. Although the comments that al-Rāzī makes about Q. 3.55 have been translated by Mahmoud Ayoub,⁷⁹⁸ following are my translation and explanation of the six paragraphs of al-Rāzī, each exploring one of the ambiguous lines of reasoning that arise from the substitution legends that several *mufasssīrūn* have used to explain the ambiguous term *shubbiha lahum*.

(The first ambiguity) In order to cast the image of a man upon another man, sophistry is necessary, for if I see my son and then I see him a second time and then at that time I confirm that this [one] whom I have seen a second time was not my son, but was a person upon whom his image has been cast, then at that time, certainty about what is perceptible through the senses (*maḥsūsāt*) (eyesight) disappears. And so the Companions who saw Muḥammad, may the prayers and peace of Allāh be upon him, commanding and forbidding them, must not [have] known that he was Muḥammad because of the possibility that he had cast his image onto another [person]. That [would] lead to the ruin of divine law (*sharāʿi*) and also the principle (*dār al-amr*, lit. the structure of authority) in successive (*mutawātir*) reports, [based] on the view that it was only the first narrator [who] reported on that which is perceptible through the senses. So, if it is possible [that] confusion

⁷⁹⁸ Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qurʾan and its Interpreters*, vol. 2 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 177-8 citing Rāzī VIII: 74-6.

may occur in perceptions (*mubaṣarāt*), [then] successive (*tawātur*) reports were ruined. First and on the whole, opening this door begins [with] sophistry and ends [with] the abolition of prophethood in its entirety.⁷⁹⁹

What al-Rāzī calls an ‘ambiguity’ is really more like a positive objection. The first ambiguity concerns sense perception (*maḥsūsāt*), a subject which al-Rāzī had considered in his *Muḥaṣṣal*. He opens his comments about this ambiguity by calling substitution legends sophistry. The naming of the *mufasssirūn* who used substitution legends to explain Jesus’ crucifixion as sophists would have been an *ad hominem* argument had he not backed up his assertion with evidence. He states that a man’s confidence in his own sense perception would disappear if someone appearing to be his son is sometimes actually his son and other times is really another person who only appears to be his son. Here he does not identify who is casting the image of his son upon another man, but when he discusses the third ambiguity, he does identify Allah as the direct cause. He expands the implication of this disappearing confidence in sense perception by bringing Muhammad into the discussion. He states that Muhammad’s Companions could not have known whether they had seen him or whether they had seen another man upon whom the image of Muhammad had been cast. The implications of this for Muslims are truly devastating; both *Sharīʿa* (Islamic law) and the authority of *mutawātir* would be

⁷⁹⁹Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* or *Kitāb al-tafsīr al-kabīr*, vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-khīriyya, 1307/1890), 466.

‘ruined’ because they both ultimately rely on the sense perception of the initial narrator, Muhammad or one of Muhammad’s Companions. *Mutawātir* reports are stories that have been transmitted by a significant number of narrators at each level of the chain of transmission. Al-Rāzī ends by saying that substitution legends begin with sophistry and end by entirely abolishing *ḥadīth*, *Sharīʿa*, prophethood and everything else related to Muhammad. While this critique is devastating by itself, al-Rāzī proceeds to discuss five more ambiguities.

(The second ambiguity) The Most-High Allāh had already commanded Gabriel, upon him be peace, to be with Him [Jesus] most of the time. In this manner, the commentators (*mufasssīrūn*) interpreted His saying, ‘If I empowered you with the Holy Spirit [Gabriel],’ then the tip of one of Gabriel’s wings, upon him be peace, would be sufficient to protect the world of humans. So, how could he [Gabriel] not [also] stop those Jews from [crucifying Jesus] Him, also upon whom be peace? Since [Jesus] had power over the life of the dead and He healed the one born blind and the leper, how [could He have] not been able to cause the death of those Jews who intended Him evil by imposing chronic illness and semi-paralysis on them so that they [would have] become unable to oppose him?⁸⁰⁰

Al-Rāzī asks two questions. How is it possible that the angel Gabriel/Holy Spirit could not protect Jesus from the Jews, in light of the fact that just the tip of his wing is sufficient to protect the whole world and that Allah had commanded Gabriel to protect Jesus, in particular? Moreover, how is it possible that Jesus could not protect Himself from the Jews when we consider that He had repeatedly

⁸⁰⁰ Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥsīn al-kabīr*, 466.

demonstrated supernatural powers over life and death? The Qur'anic evidence for Jesus' power over life and death is that Jesus Himself said that He possessed precisely these powers, 'I shall heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life' (Q. 3.49). Al-Rāzī is not alone in his opinion. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)⁸⁰¹ affirmed the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus in order to argue against His divinity by saying that Jesus could have called fire down upon the Jews just as Elijah had done in 2 Kings 1:9-12.⁸⁰² Since it stretches the credulity of anyone familiar with the Qur'an to think that the powers resident in the angel Gabriel/Holy Spirit and that the powers resident in Jesus could not protect Jesus from the Jews, Allah has no reason to resort to deception in order to protect Him.

(The third ambiguity) The Most-High was capable of delivering Him (Jesus) from those enemies by raising Him to heaven. Is there a benefit in casting His image on another [man] except in killing a poor wretch without a benefit to him?⁸⁰³

Al-Rāzī asks rhetorically if there is any benefit in casting Jesus' image onto another man. Within the question, he supplies the answer that there is no benefit in causing a submissive substitute to die in Jesus' place. Al-Rāzī reminds his readers that this verse states that Allah was capable of delivering Jesus from his enemies by

⁸⁰¹Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 79.

⁸⁰² Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, critical edition of Arabic manuscripts in David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 104.

⁸⁰³Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 466.

raising Him to heaven. We have now seen that Allah, Jesus and the angel Gabriel/
Holy Spirit were each capable of protecting Jesus. Some people might see an
allusion to the Holy Trinity here.

(The fourth ambiguity) Truly, if His (Jesus') image was cast on another
[man] [and] thereupon He (Jesus) was raised after that to heaven, then, the
people [would] believe that he (the other man) was Jesus, although he was
not Jesus, so this was casting them into ignorance and [into] deception. This
does not befit the wisdom of the Most-High Allāh.⁸⁰⁴

Al-Rāzī argues that substitution legends entail the notion that Allah is the
author of deception and ignorance. While some commentators have argued that
that is precisely what Q. 3.54 states, al-Rāzī rightly argues that it would be
oxymoronic for the all-wise Allah to create ignorance and for the all-just Allah,
who strives to reveal His will clearly, to deceive.

(The fifth ambiguity) Many of the Christians in the whole world with the
strength of their love for the Messiah, peace be upon Him, and their
exaggeration about His affair, reported that they witnessed Him being killed
[by] crucifixion. So, if we deny that, our challenge in that is the reliability of
recurrent [reports] (*tawātur*). Challenging recurrent [reports] (*tawātur*)
necessitates challenging the prophethood of Muḥammad, may the prayer
and peace of Allāh be upon him, and the prophethood of Jesus, and even the
existence of both of them and the existence of the rest of the prophets, may
the prayer and peace [of Allāh] be upon them. All of that is false.⁸⁰⁵

This fifth ambiguity revisits the authority of successive (*mutawātir*) reports;
in this case, the *mutawātir* principle is applied to the vast number of reports

⁸⁰⁴ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 466.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

affirming Jesus' crucifixion that have been narrated by Christians from around the world. Al-Rāzī argues that challenging such a multitude of well attested reports affirming Jesus' crucifixion calls into question the very existence of all of the prophets including Jesus and Muhammad. The Muslim scholars who had reported substitution legends knew that there were far fewer reports concerning Muhammad's miracles than there were concerning the crucifixion of Jesus.

This line of reasoning is not new. Over a century earlier, Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1077) had argued against a similar argument that had been posited by Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. 298/912). This was reviewed in the last chapter. The rivals of Ibn al-Rāwandī learned that a good argument does not disappear just by calling its advocate a *zindīq* ('heretic'). Al-Shīrāzī found it necessary to defend the Fāṭimid doctrine of the Imamate against the arguments of Ibn al-Rāwandī long after Ibn al-Rāwandī had passed away. Now, this compelling argument of Ibn al-Rāwandī is restated by the great al-Rāzī.

(The sixth ambiguity) It is proven by the recurrent [report] (*tawātur*) that the crucified one remained alive [for] a long time. So, if that [man] was not Jesus, but he was another man, he would have appeared anguished and said:

I am not Jesus, but I am only another man.

He [would have] gone to great lengths to emphasise that point. If this [had been] said, that [would have become] widespread among mankind. So, since

we did not find things of this [nature], we know that the affair did not [happen] in the manner that you [previous *mufasssīrūn*] mentioned.⁸⁰⁶

If it is reasonable to rely on a *tawātur* report, as the *ahl al-ḥadīth* assert, then here is a reliable *tawātur* report that proves that the one who had been crucified remained alive for a long time. In the case of Jesus, His trials took place under the cover of darkness, but it was not until 3pm the following day that He died; certainly this is enough time to protest one's innocence. Any man who had been sentenced to crucifixion because of incorrect identification would surely have protested, not just his innocence, but his mistaken identity, and he would not have stopped proclaiming that until his very last breath. If this had actually happened, the account would have become well-known.

13.4.3 Translation and analysis of the comments that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī makes in his *Kitāb al-tafsīr al-kabīr* about Q. 4.157

Al-Rāzī also comments on Q. 4.157 saying that the Jews displayed great unbelief by not believing in Jesus, ridiculing Him, diligently wanting to kill Him and lying about having done so. He repeats the grammatical discussion about *shubbiha lahum* that al-Zamakhsharī initiated and revisits the concerns he expressed in his analysis of Q. 3.55. Next, he responds to the question posed by al-Jubbā'ī saying:

Who does not know that:

⁸⁰⁶*Ibid.*

[1] evidence and that proof turns one's attention to a thing that is not affirmed from those [things] which are perceptible through the senses,

[2] [knowledge] requires that it does not depend upon something from uninterrupted reports,

[3] also in our time, that [even if] miracles stop, then the way of Allāh working miracles through a saint is open? At that time, the above-mentioned probability [that a substitution occurred during the time of the prophets, really] refers to all times.⁸⁰⁷

Al-Rāzī proceeds to challenge the reasoning that different scholars have proffered concerning:

«They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them»

He starts with the received view among Christians:

Most of the theologians say that when the Jews intended to kill Him, the Most-High Allāh raised Him to Heaven (*al-samā'*). The heads of the Jews were afraid of the occurrence of sedition among their common people, so they took a man [who led the sedition] and killed him and crucified him and deceived the people [saying] that he was the Messiah. The people did not know the Messiah, except by name, because there was little intercourse among the people.⁸⁰⁸

Al-Rāzī argues that because there were so few Christian transmitters initially that it is likely that they had entered into a pact to lie about the crucifixion. He then provides four 'reasons', actually four different substitution legends, for believing that the Most-High had cast the likeness of Jesus upon another man:

⁸⁰⁷ Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīf al-kabīr*, vol. 3, 338-9.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

(The first) When the Jews learned that He was present in the house of so-and-so with His disciples, Yahūdḥā, the head of the Jews, ordered a man among His disciples, saying to Him:

Ṭīṭāyūs, enter upon Jesus, may peace be upon Him.

He [Ṭīṭāyūs] left him [Yahūdḥā] to kill Him [Jesus], then when he entered upon Him, Allāh removed Jesus, may peace be upon Him, from the roof of the house and cast the likeness of Jesus upon that man [Ṭīṭāyūs]. They thought he [Ṭīṭāyūs] was Him [Jesus], so they crucified him and killed him.

(The second) A man guarding Him crowned Jesus. Jesus, may peace be upon Him, climbed the mountain and was raised to heaven and Allāh cast His likeness upon that guard then they killed him while he was saying:

I am not Jesus.

This second substitution legend that al-Rāzī offers in his comments on Q. 4.157

proves that the sixth ambiguity that he presents in his comments on Q. 3.55 is false.

(The third) When the Jews intended to take Him and Jesus was with ten of His disciples, He said to them:

Who will buy Paradise [by having] My likeness cast upon himself?

So, one of them said:

I [will].

Then Allāh cast the likeness of Jesus upon him, then he came out and was killed. Allāh raised Jesus, may peace be upon Him.

(The fourth) A man claimed that he was among the disciples of Jesus, may peace be upon Him, but he was a hypocrite, so he went to the Jews and pointed them to Him. When he entered with the Jews to take Him, the Most-High Allāh cast His likeness upon him, so he was killed and crucified.

These viewpoints are incompatible and are rejected--Allāh knows the truth of the affair.

Next is an extensive discussion of how the Nestorians, Melkites and Jacobites

differed in their doctrines of the nature of the person of Jesus. He then adds two

more viewpoints, actually two more substitution legends, to his discussion:

Answering those who differed are the Jews and there are two viewpoints.

(The first) When they killed the likened person, the likeness [of His face] had been cast upon his semblance, but the likeness of the body of Jesus, may peace be upon Him, had not been cast upon him. So when they killed him and they looked to his body, they said,

the face is the face of Jesus and the body is the body of another.

(The second) Al-Sadī said that the Jews were confining Jesus with ten of His disciples in a house then a man among the Jews entered it to separate Him [from His companions] and kill Him. Allāh cast the likeness of Jesus upon him and He was raised to heaven. So, they took that man and killed him despite [the fact] that he [was not] Jesus, may peace be upon Him. Then they said:

If this was Jesus, then where is our friend?

and

If he was our friend, then where is Jesus?

so that [is how] they had differing views about it.⁸⁰⁹

Al-Rāzī starts by saying that there is no doubt that, motivated by their great unbelief, the ungodly Jewish enemies of Jesus diligently sought to kill Him and then they bragged about having succeeded. Even though al-Rāzī argued against the absurdity of substitution legends in his commentary on Q. 3.55, six substitution legends appear in his exegesis of Q. 4.157.

Al-Rāzī says that most of the Muslim scholars reason that while Allāh raised Jesus to heaven, the Jews killed a rebel (a man suspected of leading sedition) and deceived their people into thinking that he was the Messiah. Although Christians had handed down uninterrupted eyewitness reports, it is likely that the Christians

⁸⁰⁹*Ibid.*

had made a pact to lie since there were few initial Christian narrators. The other way to account for the evidence is that Allah deceived both the Christians and the Jews by substituting someone else for Jesus. Al-Rāzī recites substitution legends naming four substitutes: Ṭīṭāyūs, a guard, a volunteer and Judas, before rejecting all of them. Later, he offers two additional alternatives. The first is that Jesus' face, but not His body, had been cast upon the substitute. The other is that a Jew, who entered upon Jesus when He was with ten of His disciples in a house, was transformed into the likeness of Jesus, so that the Jews were confused as to whether they had killed Jesus or their friend.

13.4.4 Observations

Al-Rāzī was commissioned by four dynasties to produce ground-breaking scholarship for which he was lavishly rewarded. Ibn Khaldūn extolled his work and Ibn Taymiyya relied on three of his books. His *tafsīr* remains one of the most important commentaries ever written. His ideas cannot be dismissed by objecting to his rational approach.

Al-Rāzī argues that there is no possibility that substitution legends tell us what actually happened. Not only can Allah not be the author of deception or injustice, Allah, the Holy Spirit and Jesus could have prevented the Jews from crucifying Jesus had any of them so desired. He also presents three arguments from

the viewpoint of sense perception and *mutawātir* that leave no possibility for the veracity of substitution legends. If Allah had deceived the witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion, there is no reason to believe any report concerning anybody, including those about Muhammad. If the vast multitudes of reports confirming Jesus' crucifixion that have been transmitted among Christians are considered unreliable, then all reports concerning all prophets must be considered unreliable. But, if *tawātur* reports are trustworthy, then we must rely on a *tawātur* report that states that Jesus hung on the cross for a long time and it is only logical to assume that if that man had not been Jesus, that man would have protested, but we have no record of such a protest. Neither the theological viewpoint of the power, knowledge and justice of Allah nor the *ahl al-ḥadīth* viewpoint of sense perception and *mutawātir* allows for substitution legends.

Al-Rāzī is inaccurate in his discussion of his sixth ambiguity; there are reports that a substitute had protested that he was not Jesus. Al-Ṭabarī includes a report that Judas protested: 'I am not your friend! I am the one who pointed you to Him!'⁸¹⁰ Al-Tha'labī includes a report transmitted by Muqātil in which the guard protests 'I am not Jesus; I am so-and so, son of so-and-so.'⁸¹¹

⁸¹⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, 373.

⁸¹¹ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf*, 409-10.

Interestingly, al-Rāzī includes an abbreviated form of the grammatical analysis of al-Zamakhsharī. Al-Rāzī rejects four substitution legends including ones that name ʾIṣṭāyūs or Judas as the substitute. Concluding his commentary on Q. 4.157, al-Rāzī says that the killing of Jesus was not certain and it was accompanied by deception; either the Jews killed a rebel and deceived their people or the few Christian narrators agreed to lie or Allah cast only the image of Jesus' face upon a substitute. While he rejects Muslim substitution legends, he still concludes with a substitutionist motif. Concerning the question raised by al-Jubbā'ī, al-Rāzī says that such miracles are only possible during the times of prophets.

13.5 Discussion

The Mu'tazilī al-Jubbā'ī raised the question of whether it was conceivable for Allah to cast the image of one person onto another person so that the two of them were indistinguishable. This question was then answered by the Twelver al-Ṭūsī, who had studied under Mu'tazilī tutelage, but not by his follower al-Ṭabarsī. Although al-Ghazālī opposes any rationalism and al-Rāzī opposes Mu'tazilī rationalism, the question was important enough to garner responses from both of them. Al-Ṭūsī answers by saying that such a thing is only conceivable for the Mu'tazilīs during the time of a prophet, but that the Twelvers can also conceive of such a miracle happening to a saint or because Imāms are virtuous or because the consensus cannot be wrong. Al-Ghazālī argues that those who live in ordinary times can trust their senses, but that those who live in the extraordinary times of a prophet, such as when Moses turns a staff into a snake or when Allah protects Jesus from the Jews who want to kill Him, must rely on revelation, rather than upon sense perception. Al-Rāzī answers that such a thing is only conceivable during the time of a prophet. Since Jesus was a prophet, he was clearly living during the time of a prophet, so all three of these scholars say that it is conceivable for Allah to cast the image of Jesus upon another man in so convincing a manner that the two are indistinguishable.

Al-Rāzī also argues both that casting the image of one man upon another is sophistry that invalidates the principle of *mutawātir* reports upon which the whole idea of prophecy and *Shari'a* rests. Allah had the power to circumvent the crucifixion and Allah cannot be the author of deception. The objections raised by al-Rāzī have not been answered by later Muslim scholars. In fact, on the contrary, Ibn Taymiyya dismissed reason as an acceptable method of exegesis, so that these ambiguities became considered unworthy of response. The approach of Ibn Taymiyya is seen in the work of al-Taftāzānī.

Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar b. 'Abd Allāh al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390) was born into a family of scholars in Taftāzān (between Nīshāpūr and Merv) in 722/1322. He was part of the court of the Khāns of the Golden Horde in Sarāy. He then found favor with Tīmūr until he lost a public debate about the commentary of al-Zamakhsharī. He possessed expertise in Ḥanafī and Shāfi'ī law as well as *uṣūl*. He wrote at least ten books of which he is best known for his commentaries on the scholarship of other scholars that continue to be used in *madrasas*.⁸¹² His *Commentary on the principles of Islam* includes the following statement:

⁸¹² W. Madelung, "al-Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar," *EI*².

But as for the narrative of the Christians (*al-Naṣāra*) concerning the killing of Jesus, on whom be peace,...such *mutawātir* narrative is absurd.⁸¹³

This statement occurs in the midst of an argument that *mutawātir* narratives necessarily yield knowledge that cannot be obtained through any other means. While Christian accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus had been regarded as credible from the time of Ibn al-Rāwandī until the time of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, only a century later these innumerable accounts that had been handed down through several continuous uninterrupted sequences are dismissed as absurd without Taftāzānī even feeling the need to offer an explanation of why these *mutawātir* accounts are absurd. Dismissing these *mutawātir* accounts was easier than responding to the compelling reasoning of al-Rāzī.

⁸¹³ *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 3, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi with the assistance of M. R. Jozi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 350.

Chapter 14-Explicit affirmations of the crucifixion of Jesus (318/930-349/960)

The one thing concerning the crucifixion of Jesus that one would not expect to find within the corpus of Muslim scholarship would be an explicit affirmation of that crucifixion. Even more unexpectedly, these affirmations come from two tenth-century opponents; one in the form of Ismā'īlī propaganda and one in the form of anti-Ismā'īlī polemic.

14.1 The Book of Highest Initiation (about 318/930 to 350/961)

14.1.1 Background

Ismā'īlīs were held in suspicion by other Muslims during the early tenth century for several reasons. The Fāṭimids conquered North Africa in 296/909 and cherished imperial ambitions. The Qaramiṭā raided Iraq regularly between 287/900 and 315/927 and then they raided *hajj* caravans and removed the Black Stone from Mecca in 318/930. The Ismā'īlīs believed that it is 'legitimate to kill, after examination under the threat of the sword, those who refuse to share their beliefs.' The Ismā'īlīs recruited members from among disaffected people and by this time, Christians became a target because they were losing their scholarly and administrative roles in the 'Abbāsīd empire as Muslims were developing these skills.⁸¹⁴

The secrecy of the Ismā'īlīs contributed to growing suspicions. Since a vow of secrecy was a precondition for Ismā'īlīs to receive any instruction or initiation, it comes as no surprise that reliable information concerning their initiation or instruction is sparse. One cannot underestimate the importance of orality, rather

⁸¹⁴S.M. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 48, 52, 56; Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker, *The Advent of the Fatimids: A Contemporary Shi'i Witness* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 2; Wladimir Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 73; Farhad Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 161-2; David Pinault, *The Shiites: ritual and popular piety in a Muslim community* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1992), 43.

than written documentation, in passing on the faith to new initiates during this era. Concerning secret initiation rites, Daftary states that ‘there is no evidence of a strictly fixed number of degrees, seven or nine, as reported by anti-Ismā‘īlī sources.’ Halm adds that the steps of Ismā‘īlī initiation rites, ‘existed only in the opponents’ fantasy; the Isma‘ili literature itself knows nothing of these’.⁸¹⁵

Nevertheless, it was generally understood that any initiate’s introduction into the secrets of the Ismā‘īlīs would have taken some time in order to proceed through multiple levels of initiation. Stern argues that it is ‘undeniable that Ismā‘īlism knew the idea of gradual initiation and even called it by the name of *balāgh*’. A tract entitled *Spiritual Perfection* by ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Walīd talks about higher degrees of Ismā‘īlī initiation. The *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm describes seven grades of increasingly sacrilegious initiation. The *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-ghulām* of the important Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman even describes the actual initiation as including instruction in cosmology, numerology, the *shahāda* and the superiority of *bāṭinī* over *ẓāhirī* exegesis. Their *bāṭin* (inner, secret) method of

⁸¹⁵Heinz Halm, *Empire of the Mahdi: The Rise of the Fatimids* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 44; Daftary, *History and Doctrines*, 137.

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exegesis and the purportedly resulting *ibāḥa* (antinomianism) raised further
suspicions about whether the Ismāʿīlīs were genuine Muslims.⁸¹⁶

Suspicious based upon a very real military and religious threat, active
recruitment, vows of secrecy, secret initiation rites, secret interpretation and
antinomian behaviour prompted the development and circulation of propaganda
in order to counter the Ismāʿīlī propaganda. One such work is the *Kitāb al-siyāsa*
waʾl-balāgh al-akbar of Abū ʿAlī Yefet b. ʿAlī al-Baṣrī that interprets the Old
Testament Book of Daniel 11:30 as foretelling that the Ismāʿīlīs would solicit Jewish
and Christian conversions through deceptive use of arguments derived from the
Holy Bible. Without providing evidence or reasons, Halm asserts that although this
work ‘has been considered authentic for centuries,’ it is really ‘a malicious forgery,
intended to discredit the Ismāʿīlīs’.⁸¹⁷

The anonymous *Book of Highest Initiation* is the preeminent example of
counter-propaganda that remains extant today, but its dating and authorship
remain uncertain. Early tenth-century suspicions may have precipitated its
composition around 320/930. However, since the early part of the book suggests
that the Ismāʿīlī *dāʿīs* could gain the confidence of Christians by talking about the

⁸¹⁶*Fihrist*, 471; Wladimir Ivanow, *Studies in Early Persian Ismailism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948), 164; Halm, *Empire*, 45; Stern, *Studies*, 57-61.

⁸¹⁷Stern, *Studies*, 85, 87, 91; Halm, *Empire*, 16.

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allegorical meaning of the cross, which is first documented in the *Kitāb al-Yanābī'* of al-Sijistānī [see Chapter 15] about 350/961, it may be that it was written sometime later.⁸¹⁸

The Book of Highest Initiation is not a genuine set of instructions that had been developed among the Ismā'īlīs, either the Qaramiṭā or the Fāṭimids, but it is rather a polemical work of counter-propaganda founded on half-truths that conveys a distorted caricature, but one that was recognisable by friend and foe alike. Some of its ideas reflect thinking found in the *Kitāb al-'ālim wa'l-ghulām* of Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman that is reviewed in this thesis. The *Book of Highest Initiation* begins with a section that mocks Ismā'īlīs for deceiving Sunnis, non-Ismā'īlī Shī'ites, Ṣābiāns, Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Manichaens, philosophers, dualists and the *dahriyya* into believing that Ismā'īlī missionaries share the beliefs of the host group by initially keeping their own doctrine secret and then slowly revealing their true beliefs later.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁸ Paul E. Walker, *The Wellsprings of Wisdom: A Study of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's Kitāb al-Yanābī'* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 28; Stern, *Studies*, 57, 65.

⁸¹⁹ Stern, *Studies*, 58, 64-7. *Dahriyya* were materialists who do not believe in Judgment Day.

14.1.2 Translation and analysis of the anonymous *Book of Highest Initiation*

The later part of *The Book of Highest Initiation* provides general guidance for how a *dāʿī* should behave. Warning against the dangers of hypocrisy, Paragraph 24 of anonymous *The Book of Highest Initiation* states:

[It is fitting that] you should become surrounded as regards knowledge, with the trickeries (*makhārīq*) of the prophets and the contradictions in their sayings and you should not be like Jesus, the son of Mary, [who] said to the Jews:

I do not reject the Law of Moses,⁸²⁰
[and] He then rejected it by making Sunday holy instead of the Sabbath; He allowed work on the Sabbath and He replaced the *qibla* of Moses by altering its direction. For this [reason, the people of] the country killed him when they disagreed with what He had said.⁸²¹

Not only does this paragraph state that the Jews killed Jesus, but it also provides the reason for this killing. The anonymous author portrays Jesus as a hypocrite for saying ‘I do not reject the Law of Moses’ by accusing Jesus of rejecting Moses’ Law in three ways. We are therefore to understand that the Jews killed Jesus for hypocrisy.

⁸²⁰“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20 ESV)

⁸²¹Arabic text of the anonymous *Bālāgh* in Samuel Stern, *Studies in Early Ismāʿīlism* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 80.

14.1.3 Observations

The Book of Highest Initiation is not a Muslim polemical tract directed against Jews or Christians, but rather it is an anonymous work that mocks the secret initiation rites of the Ismā'īlīs. The killing of Jesus, presumably by crucifixion, is stated in a matter of fact manner. In order for the unknown author's ridicule of the Ismā'īlīs to make sense, his mostly Sunni audience would have to have accepted the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion. His crucifixion is not scorned by the unknown author; it is Ismā'īlī deception that is scorned. Since deception by Ismā'īlīs is scorned, it is reasonable to expect that the anonymous author would have scorned substitution legends in which Allah had deceived Jews and Christians by making someone else look so like Jesus that the Jews mistakenly crucified the substitute.

14.2 Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 349/960)

14.2.1 Background

Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 349/960) was one of the sons of the important Manṣūr al-Yaman, better known as Ibn Ḥawshab of Kūfa (d. 302/914) who descended from 'Alī's older brother, Ibn Abī (d. 50/670).⁸²² Ibn Ḥawshab was a Mu'tazilī who, because he became disenchanted with the political quietism of Twelver Shī'ism, converted to Ismā'īlism.⁸²³ Ibn Abū'l-Fawris, the assistant to 'Abdān, recruited Ibn Ḥawshab and introduced him to an unnamed Imām who commissioned him to openly proclaim the authority of the Ismā'īlī Imām in Yemen in 266/879 where he 'acquired the pseudo-messianic *laqab* Manṣūr al-Yaman'.⁸²⁴

Although Ja'far b. Manṣūr never held a position of leadership in Yemen, he served the Fāṭimid caliphs al-Qā'im (322–334/934–946), al-Manṣūr (334–341/946–

⁸²²W. Madelung, "Manṣūr al-Yaman Abu'l-Ḳāsim al-Ḥasan b. Faradj b. Ḥawshab b. Zādhān al-Nadjdjār al-Kūfī, often known as Ibn Ḥawshab," *EI*²; dates obtained from L. Veccia Vaglieri, "Ākīl b. Abī Ṭālib," *EI*²; W. Madelung, "Ḳarmaṭī," *EI*². Lawson and Hollenberg mention 349/960 for Ja'far b. Manṣūr while the title page of *Sarā'ir wa asrār* mentions 380/990, which Halm rejects saying that it is at least as late as 365/975.

⁸²³Philip F. Kennedy, "Recognition and Metonymy in Early Ismā'īlī Memoirs—the case of Ibn Ḥawshab, "Manṣūr al-Yaman" (d. 302/914)", in *Islamic Reflections Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Alan Jones*, ed. Robert G. Hoyland and Philip Kennedy (Oxford: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 107, 110; Madelung, "Manṣūr"; Madelung, "Ḳarmaṭī".

⁸²⁴Kennedy, "Recognition", 103-4, 110; Farhad Daftary, "The Earliest Ismā'īlīs", *Arabica* XXXVIII (1991), 240; quote from Kennedy, "Recognition", 103n. 40.

953) and al-Mu‘izz (341–365/953–975) after he migrated to their Tunisian capital.⁸²⁵

The Fāṭimid caliphate was seen as illegitimate by most Muslims because ‘Ubayd Allāh claimed his right to the Imāmate through his uncle, rather than through his father, which created a need to reformulate a sacred history.⁸²⁶ Ja‘far b. Manṣūr wrote in support of the Fāṭimids at the very time that al-Mu‘izz sought to expand his authority over all Berber, Arab and Persian Ismā‘īlīs; Ja‘far argued that the Fāṭimid caliph served in place of the Imām who is in occultation.⁸²⁷

The primary works of Ja‘far b. Manṣūr include *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa’l-qirānāt* that contains prophecies proclaiming that the caliph al-Mu‘izz is the awaited Mahdī, *Sarā’ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā’* that consists of prophet stories akin to the genre of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, *Ta’wīl sūrat al-nisā’*, and *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-ghulām*. His *Kitāb al-farā’id wa-ḥudūd al-dīn* includes the important 297/919 letter from ‘Ubayd Allāh to the Fāṭimids in Yemen in which ‘Ubayd Allāh argued for his genealogical descent from ‘Alī.⁸²⁸ The *Kitāb al-kashf*, which is attributed to Ja‘far b. Manṣūr, repeatedly

⁸²⁵ M. Canard, “Fāṭimids,” *EI*²; H. Halm, “Dja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman,” *EI*².

⁸²⁶ David Bruce Hollenberg, *Interpretation After the End of Days: The Fāṭimid-Isma‘īlī Ta’wīl (Interpretation) of Ja‘far Ibn Manṣūr al-Yaman (d. 960)* (unpublished University of Pennsylvania Dissertation, 2006), 6-7; date from F. Dachraoui, “al-Mahdī ‘Ubayd Allāh,” *EI*².

⁸²⁷ Daftary, *The Isma‘īlīs*, 176-178.

⁸²⁸ H. Halm, “Dja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman,” *EI*²; Farhad Daftary, “A Major Schism in the Early Isma‘īlī Movement” *Studia Islamica* MCMXCIII, 124.

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declares the imminent manifestation of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl, although it may be a
pre-Fāṭimid work.⁸²⁹

The four commentaries (*taʿwīl*) of Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr present allegorical
aspects of the Qurʾān. Jaʿfar b. Manṣūr ‘not only narrated and revealed the inner
meanings of stories from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament unknown to
mainstream Islamic tradition, he went so far as to interpret Jewish and Christian
rituals and symbols’.⁸³⁰ He developed a cosmology consisting of seven Speaking
Prophets (*nāṭiqs*) each accompanied by an executor (*waṣī*) of which Jesus and Peter
are the fifth pair and Muhammad and ʿAlī are the sixth. Since *nāṭiqs* compile
Scripture and establish a law, while Jesus is a prophet and a messenger Who
performs miracles, and about Whom four Gospels were written, He is a somewhat
inadequate *nāṭiq* because He is not an Imām, did not compile Scripture, initiate
propaganda (*daʿwa*), establish a house of emigration (*dār al-hijra*) or establish a law
(*sharīʿa*).⁸³¹

⁸²⁹Daftary, “Schism”, 62, 77, 103-4, 109-10, 114, 133, 135, 160, 170; Daftary, “Earliest”, 230.

⁸³⁰Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 8.

⁸³¹Halm, “Djaʿfar b. Manṣūr”; Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 8, 18, 234, 278, 293, 296, 297.

14.2.2 Translation and analysis of part of the *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa'l-qirānāt*

Paragraph 19 of the prologue of the *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa'l-qirānāt* shows the cross of Jesus as the central typological figure in the cosmology of Ja'far b. Manṣūr:

Therefore, some of the senior philosophers said that the beginning of existence is two lines; one of them on the other in the middle, in the position of a:



The Messiah (peace be upon Him) mounted the cross as an example [of self-sacrifice]. That [cross] was an indication of the two sources, so two circles came to pass, one of them on the other, one of them called 'the upright star' and the other 'the star dividing the signs of the zodiac.' The upright star rotates around the dividing star every day and night, its prepared rotation is from east to west; all of the heavenly and earthly worlds and the spiritual subtleties and the natural densities are caused by its rotation.⁸³²

The cosmology of Ja'far b. Manṣūr can be summarised as follows. In the beginning, there were two lines in the shape of the cross upon which Jesus died as an example of self-sacrifice. The two lines of the cross are the sources of the sun and the moon. While the moon passes in front of the zodiac, the sun circles the earth from east to west every day and everything that exists in the natural and spiritual realm comes into existence as a result of the sun's rotation.

⁸³²Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa'l-qirānāt*, Arabic text of paragraph 19 is included in Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 161.

Unconvincingly, Hollenberg attributes this cosmology to Justin Martyr, Plato and Moses. The cosmology of Ja‘far b. Manṣūr affirms Jesus’ crucifixion without any qualifications.⁸³³ It can also be said that, according to Ja‘far b. Manṣūr, the crucifixion of Jesus is directly related to the creation of the universe, since the two pieces of wood represent the celestial spheres.

14.2.3 Translation and analysis of part of the *Sarā’ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā’*

Among the stories of prophets contained in the *Sarā’ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā’* is ‘The Story of Jesus’. This story mentions that His mother, who is of low estate, does well in marrying His carpenter father and that Jesus dies and ‘His grave is famous until our time.’ His Jewish uncle raises Jesus in Tiberias where He acquires the knowledge and wisdom of Islam and then He not only teaches His students, but He becomes the top religious leader among the Jews. His uncle moves to the Greek house of migration (just as each *nāṭiq* needs a house of migration and Muhammad migrated) in Antioch with Jesus. Jesus then returns as a Greek man who practices syncretism by mixing the Law of Moses with philosophy and materialism, conflating Easter and Passover, and deceiving the Jews into violating their ritual food laws. When He visits the Temple, the religious leaders want Him to leave, but

⁸³³Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa’l-qirānāt*, in Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 161; Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 76, 123 and 161-3.

He cleanses the Temple, so they crucify Him. About midway through the story, we find the details of His crucifixion.⁸³⁴

He informed them of the news of Yahūdā, the leader of their affair. Then at that moment, they exposed Him, then inflicted blows on Him whilst He was naked and killed Him. They wrote to Yahūdā conciliating him and appeasing him and offering him of their own accord what they could.⁸³⁵

Then after His death [and resurrection], Jesus journeys back to Tiberias where He is greeted by the elders of the city. There follows a teaching about repentance and an episode concerning dying of garments. Toward the end of the account is reference to the virgin birth of Jesus:

He said to you: the virgin will bear and give birth to a son naming Him the Lord. It is I about whom My father David prophesied in First Psalms, which was revealed to him. He said to you that the people will gather to Him and the tribes will come to Him. God will call Him His Messiah and say to Him:
You are My son; today I am Your father.⁸³⁶

The *Sarā'ir* proclaims Jesus' virgin birth in fulfillment of prophecy and provides an unequivocal account of the crucifixion of the Son of God.

⁸³⁴Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, *Sarā'ir wa-asrār al-nuṭaqā'*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1404/1984), 201-2; Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 201-4; while Hollenberg writes that the *Sarā'ir* mentions the Trinity (76 and 328), the Eucharist (76 and 327-32), and the crucifixion (76 and 328), I was only able to find the crucifixion account. Luke 1:48 says that Mary was from a humble estate.

⁸³⁵Al-Yaman, *Sarā'ir*, 202.

⁸³⁶Al-Yaman, *Sarā'ir*, 204; Hollenberg, *Interpretation*, 204.

14.2.4 Translation and analysis of part of the *Ta'wīl sūrat al-nisā'*

Ta'wīl sūrat al-nisā' states that the Jewish claim of having killed the Messiah (Q. 4.157) is just as great a slander as the Jews having killed their prophets (Q. 4.155) or Pharaoh having killed (*yudhabbiḥūna*) the firstborn Jewish boys (Q. 2.49). The Messiah is the true Imām of His age whom the Jews claimed to have recognised with certainty (*qatalahu'ilman*), but were actually mistaken. This slander raises the question of the belief, hypocrisy and obedience of the Jews. Allah accused the Jews of not knowing the true nature of Jesus' condition, of not properly guarding their Imām, of inventing the killing, and then He dismissed them while emphasizing their disagreement and subterfuge. Allah raised Jesus to a higher rank (*ḥadd*) while removing Him from His community. While the outer meaning of this passage may concern the crucifixion of Jesus, the inner meaning concerns the inability of the Jews to recognize their Imām the first time Jesus appeared to them.⁸³⁷

14.2.5 Analysis of part of the *Kitāb al-'ālim wa'l-ghulām*

This Arabic work is strikingly different from the Persian works encountered in this thesis because it integrates hundreds of Qur'anic citations into a smoothly

⁸³⁷Ja'far b. Manṣur al-Yaman, *Ta'wīl sūrat al-nisā'* (London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies ms. 1103), 176-7.

flowing dialogue.⁸³⁸ Scholars are not certain about who wrote this work or when it was written. Madelung doubts the attribution of authorship to either Ibn Ḥawshab or Ja'far b. Manṣūr.⁸³⁹ Because Morris argues that the animal parables in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* served as a model for the *Kitāb* and that the *Kitāb* is a pre-Fāṭimid work, he has to date the *Rasā'il* to the ninth century,⁸⁴⁰ yet on good authority, Alain George states that the *Rasā'il* was composed during the 308-49/920-60 period.⁸⁴¹ This leads to the provisional acceptance of Ja'far b. Manṣūr as the author, but even if he was not, he would likely have been familiar with the work of his father or one of the few other pre-Fāṭimid Ismā'īlī scholars. The *Kitāb al-'ālim wa'l-ghulām*, *The Master and The Disciple*,⁸⁴² or *The Wise Man and The Boy*,⁸⁴³ is more accurately translated as *The Scholar and The Young Prophet* because *ghulām* is translated as 'young prophet' in its eleven Qur'anic appearances.⁸⁴⁴ Named after the Qur'anic

⁸³⁸ James W. Morris, *The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialog: Arabic Edition and English translation of Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman's Kitāb al-'Ālim wa'l-ghulām* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 19-20.

⁸³⁹ W. Madelung, "Manṣūr al-Yaman Abu'l-Ḳāsim al-Ḥasan b. Faradj b. Ḥawshab b. Zādhān al-Nadjdjār al-Kūfī, often known as Ibn Ḥawshab," *El²*;

⁸⁴⁰ Morris, *Master*, 4, 8, 15.

⁸⁴¹ George, *Calligraphy*, 109; in a personal email dated 10 Sept 2011, Alain George said that his dating was influenced by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, who is editing a critical edition of the *Rasā'il*.

⁸⁴² Morris, *Master*.

⁸⁴³ Halm, *Empire*, 45.

⁸⁴⁴ Morris, *Master*, 175 n. 22.

Messenger to Thamūd in Arabian Nabataea,⁸⁴⁵ the ‘young prophet’ of the *Kitāb* is Ṣāliḥ b. al-Bakḥṭarī,⁸⁴⁶ who at forty years old,⁸⁴⁷ is young when compared to the elders with whom he interacts.

The *Kitāb* invites initiates into an “increasingly deeper inner, necessarily ‘personalised’ exploration” of the faith including cosmology, numerology, the *shahāda*, and the superiority of *bāṭinī* over *ẓāhirī* exegesis. Ṣāliḥ inquires into proper behaviour (*ādāb*) through a series of dialogues with religious leaders from other Muslim sects, the last of which is with his father’s Mu’tazilī shaykh, ‘Abd al-Jabbār Abū Mālīk. Ṣāliḥ ridicules rules of conduct (*ādāb*), Traditions (*ḥadīth*), poetry (*ash’ār*), analogy (*qiyās*), consensus (*ijmā’*), religion based on *ḥadīth*, uncritical faith (*taqlīd*), the way that *ḥadīth* have caused law (*Shari’a*) to depart from revelation and the abstractness of the Mu’tazilī understanding of ‘Oneness’ and ‘Justice’. Although it is agreed that there needs to be a continuous line of prophets to remind the people, Ṣāliḥ rejects the Mu’tazilī *ijmā’* ‘that the continuous line of prophets terminates with Muhammad because this belief allows the Mu’tazilīs to slay contemporary prophets by claiming that they are not prophets, just as the previous religions had done. Rather, Ṣāliḥ argues for a continuous line of prophets,

⁸⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 127, 193 n. 136.

⁸⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 126.

who stand in opposition to the oppressive ‘Abbāsids. This discussion ends when Abū Mālīk humbly submits to Ṣāliḥ and the secrets of Ismā‘īlī dogma. The killing of prophets clearly refers to the repeated Qur’anic accusation that the Jews killed the prophets that Allah had sent to them, the last of whom was Jesus.⁸⁴⁸

14.2.6 Observations

The *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa’l-qirānāt* states that the entire cosmos is dependent upon the sun and the moon that originated in the two lines of the cross of Jesus. Placing the cross of Jesus at the centre of his cosmology only makes sense if the historicity of the crucifixion was widely or universally accepted. The Neo-Platonic cosmology of Ja‘far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman is entirely at odds with both the Biblical and Qur’anic creation account. His *Sarā’ir* proclaims Jesus’ virgin birth in fulfillment of prophecy and proclaims an unequivocal account of the atoning crucifixion of the Son of God followed by His resurrection. His *Ta’wīl sūrat al-nisā’* shows that the inner meaning of Q. 4.157 is that the Jews did not recognize their imām the first time Jesus appeared to them. His *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-ghulām* objects to terminating the continuous line of prophets at Muhammad, because that allows religious authorities to continue killing true prophets without acknowledging that they are prophets, which is just like the Jews did to Jesus and other prophets.

⁸⁴⁸ Morris, *Master*, 27, 61, 72-3, 128, 130, 134, 138, 140-2, 144, 147, 151, 156-9, 169, 170, 199 n. 174; Halm, *Empire*, 45.

14.3 Discussion

The Book of Highest Initiation is an anonymous tract that mocks the secret initiation rites of the Ismā'īlīs and affirms the killing of Jesus, presumably by crucifixion. His crucifixion is not scorned, but rather it is deception, like substitution legends, that is scorned. This ridicule only makes sense if the Sunni audience accepted the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion.

Four works of Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman that deal with the crucifixion of Jesus have survived. His *Kitāb al-fatarāt wa'l-qirānāt* states that the entire cosmos is dependent upon the sun and the moon that originated in the two lines of the cross of Jesus, an idea that only makes sense if the historicity of the crucifixion was widely accepted. The *Sarā'ir* is an unequivocal account of the atoning crucifixion of the Son of God followed by His resurrection. The *Ta'wīl sūrat al-nisā'* shows that the inner meaning of Q. 4.157 is that the Jews did not recognize their imām, Jesus. The *Kitāb al-'ālim wa'l-ghulām* objects to terminating the continuous line of prophets with Muhammad because doing so allows religious authorities to continue killing true prophets just like the Jews did to Jesus. These are the clearest affirmations of the crucifixion of Jesus found within the corpus of Islamic scholarship.

Chapter 15-Use of technical religious terms: *nāsūt*, *lāhūt* and *iltibās* (318/930-606/1209)

The familiarity of early Muslim scholars with Christian doctrine is demonstrated through the adoption of the Aramaic liturgical terms for human nature (*nāsūt*) and divine nature (*lāhūt*) by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (318/930-359/970). While the distinction between a human body (*jasad*) and a spirit (*rūḥ*) is also made, what is important here is the distinction between the divine nature and the human nature of Jesus that constitute the *hypostatic union* of orthodox Christianity. The Assyrian ascetic Aphrahat (d. 345) articulated his thoroughly orthodox Christology not in Greek or Latin, but in Syriac.⁸⁴⁹

Almost three centuries after the Ikhwān, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) picked up on the use of *nāsūt* and *lāhūt* and added the even rarer term *iltibās*. Abū Bishr ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān b. Qanbar (d. 180/796) was an early Baṣran grammarian⁸⁵⁰ who coined the term *iltibās* to mean 'involvement with something semantically linked'.⁸⁵¹ The term *iltibās* also appears in the titles of two works of literature during

⁸⁴⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Development of Christian Doctrine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 27.

⁸⁵⁰ M.G. Carter, "Sībawayhi," *El*².

⁸⁵¹ R. Arnaldez, et al., "Sabab," *El*².

the period in which Rūzbihān al-Baqlī lived.⁸⁵² *İltibās* conveys the idea that the transcendent Allah makes Himself immanent through disguises. This mystical notion is quite distinct from the mainstream idea that Allah is transcendent to the exclusion of immanence because He is entirely different from His creation.

⁸⁵² A. Saleh, “Mihmindār,” *El*² says that a 7th/13th century Mamlūk court dignitary with the rank of *Mihmirdār*, Badr al-Dīn Abu’l-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf b. Sayf al-Dawla b. Zammākh b. Thumāma al-Tha‘labī al-Amīr al-Ḥamdānī, composed a work of poetry entitled *Izālat al-iltibās fi’l-farq bayn ishtiḳāq wa’l-jinās*; Gamal el-Dīn el-Shayyal, “İbn ṢHaddād, Bahā’ al-Dīn Abu’l-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf b. Rāfi‘ b. Tamīm,” *El*² says that Bahā’ al-Dīn Abu’l-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf b. Rāfi‘ b. Tamīm b. Shaddād (d. 632/1235), not the biographer of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, wrote *Malja’ al-ḥukkām ‘ind iltibās al-aḥkām*.

15.1 *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (318/930-359/970)

15.1.1 Background

One of the great works of Arabic literature, the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, were likely written in Baṣra, but the dating and authorship remain contested. Stern argues for an early date by attributing authorship to 'Alī (d. 40/661) or Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 147/765), or one of the hidden Shī'ī Imāms such as Imām Aḥmad (d. 225/840), the last of whom authorship is attributed by Ivanow. Morris argues that since the animal parables in the *Rasā'il* may have been a model for the early tenth century *The Scholar and the Young Prophet* of Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, the *Rasā'il* must have been written in the late ninth century. Hamdani argues that the *Rasā'il* were compiled at the beginning of the tenth century immediately before the foundation of the Fāṭimid caliphate in 297/909. Netton, Madelung and al-Bizri prefer the late tenth century.⁸⁵³

More recently, a slightly earlier date has been proposed by Alain George who states that Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥidī (d. 414/1023) personally knew the authors, Zayd b. Rafā'a, Abū Sulaymān al-Maqdisī, the *qāḍī* Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Hārūn al-Zanjānī, Abū Aḥmad al-Nahrajūrī and al-'Awfī, who composed the *Rasā'il* during the

⁸⁵³Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity [Ikhwān al-Ṣafā']* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1982), 1, 4, 89; Stern, *Studies*, 166; Ivanow, *Tradition*, 46; Morris, *The Master and the Disciple*, 8, 15; Daftary, *Literature*, 96; Y. Marquet, "*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*," *EI*²; Madelung, "*Ḳarmaṭī*," *EI*²; Nader el-Bizri, "*Brethren of Purity*," *MIC*, 118.

920-960 period. Al-Bayhaqī mentions that al-Tawḥidī and al-Sijistānī (d. 361/971)

met weekly during this period and that both were familiar with the *Rasā'il*.⁸⁵⁴

The epistles are a unique blend of wisdom assimilated from other traditions in order to 'unite all branches of knowledge' into an encyclopaedic world view by incorporating elements of magic, divination, astrology, philosophy, monotheism, fables and parables. Accounts of Jewish prophets show affinity with the Jewish Torah, Psalms, Midrash, Talmud, and Haggadah. Buddhist didactic parables like the 'Great Debate of the Animals', are included. The letters do not uncritically adopt the whole of any particular school of thought, but rather they seek to develop their own unique nuanced integrated world-view, although they do not achieve internal consistency.⁸⁵⁵

15.1.2 Translation and analysis of portions of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*

Accounts concerning Jesus show affinity with both the Christian Gospels and apocryphal works. Such respect is shown for the Gospels that the Ikhwān recommend that their initiates recite Gospel accounts because doing so provides as much protection from *jinn* (demons) as does reciting a Qur'anic verse. The *Rasā'il*

⁸⁵⁴ For the date of the *Rasā'il*, see above, 293-4 n. 836-8. Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The cultural revival during the Buyid age* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 166-7, 196 cites the *Tatimmat ṣiwān al-ḥikma* of al-Bayhaqī. Date from S.M. Stern, "Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥidī," *EI*².

⁸⁵⁵ Netton, *Neoplatonists*, 43, 73, 83-8, 92-93, 108; Daftary, *The Isma'ilis*, 248-249; Marquet, "Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'," *EI*²; quote from Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, 7.

reflect a high view of Jesus; rather than the Qur'anic 'Son of Mary,' Jesus is usually referred to as Jesus ('*Īsā*), Christ (Ar. *al-Masīḥ*; Heb. *Messiah*; Gk. *Christos*), Jesus Christ ('*Īsā 'l-Masīḥ*), and Son of the Father (*Ibn al-Ab*). Jesus' life provides a few examples from which the Ikhwān teach morality.⁸⁵⁶

Netton's translation of the *Rasā'il* mentions that both Herod and the Jewish crowds wanted to kill Jesus. Nonetheless, 'Christ was content with the decree of God and submitted to destiny and surrendered His humanity (*nāsūtahu*) to the Jews'.⁸⁵⁷ Jesus makes His submission to the will of His Father clear to His disciples at the Last Supper:

When God most high wished to take Him unto Himself, and raise Him to Him, His disciples gathered with Him in Jerusalem in a single room with His disciples, and He said: "I am going to My Father and your Father, and I will lay a commission on you before I leave My humanity (*nāsūtī*)."⁸⁵⁸

Jesus pronounces the Great Commission during the Last Supper, rather than after His resurrection saying to His disciples:

Go to the kings at the ends [of the earth] and inform them from Me of what I have taught you. Summon them to what I have summoned you and neither

⁸⁵⁶ Netton, *Neoplatonists*, 54, 70.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 58 cross-referencing Phil. 2:7-8.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, cross-referencing Mt 26:18-9, Mk 14:14-6, Luke 13:31, 22:10-12, John 11:53-4, 13:1, 14:12 & 28, 16:10 & 28. Much of what the *Rasā'il* says about the crucifixion has also been translated by James Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology: a study of the interpretation of theological ideas in the two religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), vol. 1, part 1, page 39.

fear nor stand in awe of them. After separating from My Humanity (*nāsūtī*) I will stand in the air on the right hand of the throne of My Father and your Father.⁸⁵⁹

Onto the Christian account of the Great Commission are added the Islamic ideas of achieving victory and the Mu'tazilī doctrine of commanding good and forbidding evil:

I will be with you wherever you go and be your helper, providing you with victory and support, with the permission of My Father. Go to them and summon them with friendliness, treat them and *command the good and forbid the evil* until you are killed or crucified or expelled from the land [Netton's emphasis].⁸⁶⁰

Jesus is arrested on the morning following the Last Supper:

The next day He went out and appeared to the people; He began to summon them and warn them until He was seized and brought the King of the Jews, who ordered Him to be crucified.⁸⁶¹

There follows next the actual crucifixion account that is remarkably parallel to that given in the Gospels:

So His humanity (*nāsūtuhu*) was crucified and His hands were nailed to the two planks of wood of the cross. He remained crucified from the forenoon to the afternoon. He asked for water and was given vinegar to drink, and He was pierced by the lance. Then He was buried in the vicinity of the cross and forty men were set to guard the tomb. All this took place in the presence of His friends and disciples and when they saw what had happened, they were convinced and knew that He had not ordered them to do anything which He Himself had not done. Then they gathered after three

⁸⁵⁹ Netton, *Neoplatonists*, 59 cross-referencing Mt 28:19, 10:28, 18:20, Mk 16:15 & 19, John 20:17, Acts 1:8, Ps. 110:1, Q 3.75.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*

days in the place in which He had promised them that He would appear to them and they saw that sign which was between Him and them. The news spread among the Jews that Christ had not been killed so the tomb was opened and His human body (*al-nāsūt*) was not found [there].⁸⁶²

Lastly, the *Rasā'il* documents that the disciples responded to the Great Commission:

Then those apostles, who accepted His instruction, dispersed among the countries and every one of them went where he was sent: one went to the Maghreb, one to Abyssinia, two to Rome, two to the king of Antioch, one to Persia, one to India, and two live among the tribe of Israel. They called [people] to behold the Messiah until most of them were killed and the call of the Messiah appeared in the east.⁸⁶³

Jesus' commission is explained as an evangelistic mission like those that were central to tenth century Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs, Qarmaṭī Ismā'īlīs, and to the Ikhwān. The *Rasā'il* shows Jesus exercising his volition in leaving/surrendering/separating from His humanity. The title Son of the Father (*Ibn al-Ab*) is surprising in light of the repeated Qur'anic polemic that Allah has no son; even more so when associated with the power inherent in being at His Father's right hand. Jesus' statement that, 'I am going to My Father and your Father' is a claim to divinity, one which subjected residents of the medieval *dār-al-Islām* to capital punishment. Elsewhere, the *Rasā'il* equate 'The Truth' with 'My Father'.⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, 59-60 cross-referencing Mt 27-8 and John 19.

⁸⁶³ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-ṣafā'*, 4 vol. (Beirut: Dar Ṣādir, 1376/1957), 4.30-1.

⁸⁶⁴ Netton, *Neoplatonists*, 58, 64, 66-7.

The 'Debate of the Animals' section of the letters introduces distinctively Christian terminology that was in widespread use in neighbouring Syria; terms that were used by Nestorian and Monophysite Christians became important to Muslim scholars who were discussing Jesus.⁸⁶⁵

Praise be to God who made the body (*jasad*) of the humanity (*al-nāsūt*) from the Virgin Mary, and joined the substance (*jawhar*) of the divinity (*al-lāhūt*) to it, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*).⁸⁶⁶

The Nestorians emphasised Jesus' *nāsūt* and the Monophysites emphasised His *lāhūt*, while the Melkites argued that both sects had so overemphasised their distinctive terms that they were both heretical. While the *Rasā'il* affirms Jesus' divinity and His crucifixion, it denies the Trinity:

Among the false views and beliefs which are injurious to the souls of their believers is that of the man who believes that his creator and his God is the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*) whom the Jews killed and whose humanity (*nāsūtahu*) they crucified and whose divinity (*lāhūtuhu*) fled on seeing the agony which befell His humanity.⁸⁶⁷

15.1.3 Observations

The 'Debate of the Animals' not only makes a distinction between Jesus' human nature (*nāsūt*) and His divine nature (*lāhūt*), but it also states that human nature consists of more than just a human body (*jasad*), it includes an immortal soul (*rūḥ*). No mention is made of His divine nature in the crucifixion account

⁸⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 55.

⁸⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 61.

because it was Jesus' human nature that His friends and disciples saw crucified, dead, buried, and which was not present in the tomb because His human nature had risen from the grave to meet His disciples in Galilee. The language used favours the Nestorian emphasis on the *nāsūt* of Jesus over the Monophysite emphasis on the *lāhūt* of Jesus. The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* provides an unequivocal account of the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of the *nāsūt* of Jesus.

15.2 Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209)

15.2.1 Background

Ṣadr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Fasā'ī al-Daylamī al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209) was born into a Daylamī family living in Fārs in 522/1128.⁸⁶⁸ Twenty years later, the Salghurid Turks established themselves in Shīrāz as vassals to the Seljuq Turks who had been ruling Persia for a century.⁸⁶⁹ In Shīrāz, al-Baqlī preached in the mosque, established his own Ṣūfī hospice and wrote several books. Known for his ecstatic utterances and supererogatory prayers,⁸⁷⁰ he became known as the ‘Sufi Prophet of Love’,⁸⁷¹ *shaykh al-shaṭaḥāt* (The Master of Ecstatic Speech)⁸⁷² and *pīr-i ḥādī va-‘ārif-i pāk* (The Master of Guidance and Pure Gnostic).⁸⁷³

Al-Baqlī was an important Ṣūfī with important connections to his predecessors and successors. Most of the works of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) that have

⁸⁶⁸ C. Ernst, “Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Fasā'ī al-Daylamī al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī, Ṣadr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad,” *El'*; Carl W. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 2.

⁸⁶⁹ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 1.

⁸⁷⁰ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 4; Ernst, “Rūzbihān”.

⁸⁷¹ Ruzbihān Baqlī, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master*, tr. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hills, NC: Parvardigar Press, 1997), v.

⁸⁷² Baqli, *Unveiling*, xv.

⁸⁷³ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 6.

come down to us have done so through the efforts of al-Baqlī,⁸⁷⁴ who explained the thoughts of al-Ḥallāj using *ḥadīth* authenticated by *isnāds* attributed to the sun, stars, angels, spirits, or other cosmic powers.⁸⁷⁵ Not only did he follow in the footsteps of al-Ḥallāj,⁸⁷⁶ al-Baqlī claims to have experienced ecstatic states beyond those which al-Ḥallāj had experienced.⁸⁷⁷ His great-grandson documents that in addition to repeating the ‘I am the Truth’ of al-Ḥallāj, that al-Baqlī added ‘Glory be to me.’⁸⁷⁸

While the work of al-Baqlī prospered throughout North Africa, Central Asia and India and influenced the poetic work of Ḥāfiẓ (d. 791/1389) in Iran, it faded from view during the sixteenth to early twentieth centuries.⁸⁷⁹ Ernest states that al-Baqlī ‘was the author of one of the most important commentaries of the Qur’an,’⁸⁸⁰ *Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, which is one of his almost fifty extant works.⁸⁸¹ Lawson has a translation of this section on pages 108-9 of his book. Rūzbihān al-Baqlī comments on only the most difficult phrases of Q. 4.157.

⁸⁷⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 74.

⁸⁷⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical*, 71.

⁸⁷⁶ Schimmel, *Mystical*, 297.

⁸⁷⁷ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 147.

⁸⁷⁸ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 149.

⁸⁷⁹ Baqli, *Unveiling*, ix, xv; Ernst, *Mysticism*, 6.

⁸⁸⁰ Baqli, *Unveiling*, xi.

⁸⁸¹ Ernst, “Rūzbihān”; Ernst, *Mysticism*, 152.

15.2.2 Translation and analysis of the comments about Q. 4.157 in the *Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī

Al-Baqlī sets out to explain the clear and apparent meaning of the ambiguous phrase *shubbiha lahum*. The part of his analysis that is important for this thesis follows:

They intended to kill Him, so God, may He be praised, cast the reflection of that resemblance (*shabah*) onto [some]one [else] convincingly and craftily. So they killed him (the substitute) because they did not find in him any of the sweetness of love and joy of ardour which they had found in Jesus....It has been said in the *tafsīr* about God's raising Him up to Him that He attired Him [in] feathers, and clothed Him [in] light, and removed [from Him] the pleasure of eating and drinking. He [Jesus] flew with the angels around the throne and He was human, angelic, heavenly and earthly.⁸⁸²

Although Rūzbihān al-Baqlī sets out to present the 'plain apparent nature' of the ambiguous phrase *wa lākin shubbiha lahum*, his exegesis is anything but plain and obvious. He uses technical vocabulary and syntax in a special form of reasoning that bears no relationship to anything encountered elsewhere in this thesis. The quality of the text does not help matters; several consonants are difficult to distinguish; dotting and *alifs* are misplaced and superfluous; while the script is sometimes squeezed between lines at the left margin of the page. Al-Baqlī commences by stating that Jesus is Allah's spiritual being to whom Allah has given power over life and death. When Allah rescued Jesus from the Jews who intended

⁸⁸² Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1429/2008), 166-7.

to kill and crucify Him, He only raised Jesus' body while His spirit remained behind in order to sculpt some of His followers into His form. Three factors contribute to the confusion; Allah was not above mixing divinity with humanity, the Jews and the Christians had a predisposition toward anthropomorphism, and only a few of them could distinguish between eternal reality and the unprecedented sudden manifestation of deity. The Jews demonstrated their anthropomorphism by combining gold with deity in their golden calf (Q. 2:92-3) and by claiming that Ezra is divine while the Christians demonstrated their anthropomorphism by saying that Allah is the Messiah:

«The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said 'The Messiah is the son of God' (Q. 9.30)»

According to al-Baqlī, Allah used persuasiveness, deception and confusion in the sudden casting of the form or likeness of Jesus onto others. The disciple who was killed in place of Jesus was no match to Jesus in terms of his love or passion. Raising Jesus entailed clothing Him in feathers and light, removing His desire for food and drink and enabling Him to fly with His angels so that Jesus demonstrated his earthly, heavenly, human and angelic characteristics.

While he provides no excuse for Jewish error, al-Baqlī says that Christians err because they are confused and this is because they cannot distinguish between the holiness of the eternal truth of the Qur'an and the unprecedented persuasive

deceptive sudden manifestation of divinity in Jesus. Nonetheless, Christians are said to be culpable because Jesus made the truth clear to them, but Christians neglected Allah's saying about the matter.

Al-Baqlī makes extensive use of important theological terms, technical terms and terms that have a special meaning for himself and other Ṣūfis. The Aramaic terms *lahūt* and *nasūt* (and *nāsūtiyya*) were introduced by the *Ikhwan al-Ṣafā'*. He also uses Arabic terms for divinity and light of divinity (*nūr al-ulūhiyya*). He uses both *ṣūra* and *shabah* for 'form' and 'likeness'. Among the scholars in this study, he is the only one to use *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism), *tanzīh* (de-anthropomorphism), *manqūsha* (sculpted), *mu'ayyad* (supported), *makr* (deception) and *baghata al-iltibās* (the suddenness of the confusion). Veiling, unveiling and *iltibās* occur so frequently in the works of al-Baqlī⁸⁸³ that he wrote the *Commentary on Veils and Coverings* in order to explain their usage.⁸⁸⁴ The term *iltibās* means 'confusion, tangle, intricacy, obscurity, ambiguity, dubiousness, doubt'. *Iltibās* can, however, take on a more nuanced technical theological meaning when used in exegesis. Its range of meaning includes concealing a man like a drop of water within the vast ocean,⁸⁸⁵ Allah's manifestation of Himself to man,⁸⁸⁶ Allah's

⁸⁸³ Baqli, *Unveiling*, xii.

⁸⁸⁴ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 36.

⁸⁸⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical*, 5.

envelopment of a man,⁸⁸⁷ Allah's concealment of something beneath an appearance,⁸⁸⁸ clothed with divinity,⁸⁸⁹ or Allah's clothing of a man in divinity.⁸⁹⁰

Taken in these later senses, Allah used persuasion and deception when He veiled His *lāhūt* (divinity) within Jesus' *nāsūt* (humanity) at the moment that He rescued Jesus from the Jews, who intended to kill and crucify Him. Christians erred by mistaking this sudden deceptive unveiling and manifestation of divinity for the human Jesus of whom the eternal Qur'an teaches. This is no *hypostatic union* of *lāhūt* and *nāsūt*, but rather it is a momentary deception perpetrated by Allah.

Lawson mentions four concepts related to *iltibās* that require clarification: 'spiritual disguise', 'amphiboly', 'oneness of being', and 'emanation or transcendence'. *Iltibās* can be understood as a 'spiritual disguise', rather than as confusion. 'Amphiboly', an ambiguous grammatical construction that is intended to deceive through its equivocal meaning, is really an accusation against how Allah constructed this verse, rather than an explanation of the events. The 'oneness of being' theory of Ibn al-'Arabī (637/1240) holds that the only entity Who exists is Allah. This is not helpful because al-Baqlī denies the divinity of Jesus and the

⁸⁸⁶ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 104 n. 56.

⁸⁸⁷ Schimmel, *Mystical*, 79.

⁸⁸⁸ Baqli, *Unveiling*, xix; Schimmel, *Mystical*, 299.

⁸⁸⁹ Baqli, *Unveiling*, xii.

⁸⁹⁰ Ernst, *Mysticism*, 35.

crucifixion of Jesus when this theory says that he should deny the existence of Jesus. The question of emanation or transcendence suggests that since Allah appears to humankind by emanating or appearing through disguises, our senses cannot be trusted.

15.2.3 Observations

In his comment 'Al-Baqlī wants us to appreciate the problems of perception and recognition that he sees as the main subject of this verse',⁸⁹¹ Lawson leads us to believe that al-Baqlī is more concerned with vision problems than he is with the divinity or crucifixion of Jesus without explaining why al-Baqlī denies both.

Without studying the works of al-Baqlī extensively, one cannot be certain about whether he intends to use certain technical terms as synonyms or to make fine distinctions between them or to present the non-Gnostic with an insoluble mystery or whether he does not understand that he himself is confused. While al-Baqlī says that he is declaring the clear obvious nature of *shubbiha lahum*, nothing is clear or obvious about his explanation. His explanation of the *bāṭin* (inner) meaning of *shubbiha lahum* must be extraordinarily inaccessible to all except the privileged Gnostic initiates. While his use of technical language is interesting, al-Baqlī says that a substitute was crucified instead of Jesus.

⁸⁹¹Lawson, 110.

15.3 Discussion

The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* provide an unequivocal account of the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of the *nāsūt* of Jesus, which includes both his human body (*jasad*) and its immortal soul (*rūḥ*), while His divine nature (*lāhūt*) escaped that fate. Al-Baqlī says that Jesus is higher than the angels, His divine soul, which is part of his human, not divine, nature, separates from His body, but in contrast to the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, a substitute is crucified instead of Jesus. It is necessary to point out that the Qur'an does not recognize a dualism between a soul and a body, much less between a human nature and a divine nature; in fact while *naḥs* has been taken to mean a soul that is separate from the body, it almost always meant self in Qur'anic usage.⁸⁹²

⁸⁹² Rahman, *Major Themes*, 112.

Chapter 16-The crucifixion of Jesus used as a typological explanation (322/933-361/971)

Three scholars use the crucifixion of Jesus as a typology to explain other doctrines. Abū Ḥātim responds to a statement by al-Nasafī that Jesus is a type for the seventh *Nāṭiq*. Abū Ya‘qub al-Sijistānī portrays a typology of both the cross and of the *shahāda* (profession of faith).

16.1 *Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 322/933-4) and al-Nasafī (d. 332/943)*

16.1.1 Background

Abu'l-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bazdawī (d. 332/943), known as al-Nasafī, was the third Qarmaṭī Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* of Nīshāpūr responsible for Khurasan and Transoxania. In exchange for 119,000 gold coins, he persuaded the Sāmānid ruler of Khurasan, Naṣr b. Aḥmad (r. 914-43), to join the Ismā'īlī cause, but when Naṣr recanted on his deathbed and his son Nūḥ discovered that al-Nasafī had held back a third of the coins, Nūḥ massacred al-Nasafī along with many Ismā'īlīs. Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Naṣr thought that al-Nasafī worked for the Fāṭimid caliph al-Qā'im bi-al-Amr, not for the Qarāmiṭā.⁸⁹³

Al-Nasafī introduced Neo-Platonic philosophy into Ismā'īlī thought in his *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl*. His extra-Qur'anic cosmology concerning the emanation of the Soul from the Intellect starts a long controversy to which Abū Ḥātim responds with his *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ* that provokes responses from Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī and Ḥamīd al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Kirmānī (d. 411/1020). *Al-iṣlāḥ* names neither its opponent nor the title of the work that it is correcting, but we can be sure that the *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl* was

⁸⁹³ *Fihrist*, 467-8; I. Poonawala, "al-Nasafī," *El*²; Abū Ḥātim, *Iṣlāḥ*, 11; the *nisba* means 'from the village of Bazda', which is near Nasaf and Bukhārā.

written by al-Nasafī because Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī cites material common to both *al-Maḥṣūl* and *al-Iṣlāḥ*.⁸⁹⁴

Because the *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl* of al-Nasafī is non-extant, the *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ* of Abū Ḥātim appears to be the oldest extant Neo-Platonic Ismāʿīlī text. *Al-Iṣlāḥ* is a comprehensive syncretic work of philosophy, prophetology, soteriology and ethics that teaches that there are seven cycles of Speaking-Prophets (*nāṭiqs*) who abrogate the previous law. It also teaches that Zoroastrianism, Sabianism, Judaism and Christianity are reproachable religions, that the Murjiʿa, Qadariyya, Khawārij and the Rāfiḍa (Twelvers) sects of Islam are blamable, and that only the Ismāʿīlīs are the *ahl al-ḥaqīqa* (the people of truth). On Judgment Day, the *Qāʾim* (the Shīʿī Messiah-like or Mahdī-like figure) will return with the angel Gabriel to conquer Mecca and Medina demonstrating that the *Qāʾim* is more important than Muhammad.⁸⁹⁵

While Ismāʿīlī cosmology portrays Jesus as the fifth *nāṭiq*, *al-Iṣlāḥ* says that al-Nasafī argued that Jesus is unworthy of this position because He did not compose Scripture or sacred law, but rather He followed the Law of Moses. In response, Abū

⁸⁹⁴Poonawala, “al-Nasafī,” Abū Ḥātim, *Iṣlāḥ*, 11; Nomoto, *Early Ismāʿīlī Thought*, 5, 37, 256 n. 37.

⁸⁹⁵Nomoto, *Early Ismāʿīlī Thought*, 119; Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Iṣlāḥ*, 11, 14-6, 21, 23; Daftary, 235, 237 and 240; W. Madelung, “Ḳarmaṭī”.

Ḥātim argues both that it is permissible for the followers of a *nāṭiq* to compose Scripture and that Jesus abolished, rather than followed, the Mosaic Law.⁸⁹⁶

Although *al-Iṣlāḥ* of Abū Ḥātim often quotes *al-Maḥṣūl* of al-Nasafī, that is not the case concerning Jesus' crucifixion, so only the typology of al-Nasafī as presented by this opponent is available to us.

16.1.2 Translation and analysis of portions of the *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ*

Following is my translation of the section in the *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ* concerning Jesus' crucifixion from 'The Chapter on [al-Nasafī's] Statement on the Fifth Speaking Prophet'.⁸⁹⁷

As for the saying in [the *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl* of al-Nasafī]:

That the fifth [*Nāṭiq*] resembles the seventh because He vanished and was raised to heaven then returns like the seventh vanished then returns.⁸⁹⁸

We have stated in the chapter of the resemblance of the fifth with the seventh, of which a part is concerning the chapter of concealment [that] the concealment is not like the concealment of the seventh. Allāh, He is mighty and glorious, in His story, a story about the Jews, said:

«And said, 'We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.' [until the end of] the verse»

What Allāh stated, described in this verse, diverges from what the people of the books [both Jews and Christians proclaim is] in literal meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the revelation, because Allāh, He is mighty and glorious, stated that the Jews did not kill Him and that He imposed His [Jesus'] resemblance (*shabahahu*) upon the one who pointed to Him, then they killed the one who

⁸⁹⁶ Nomoto, *Early Ismā'īlī Thought*, 258-61.

⁸⁹⁷ Shin Nomoto includes a translation of this text in his unpublished dissertation.

⁸⁹⁸ Ivanow, *Studies*, 155-6 supports this translation.

resembled Him (*shubbiḥ*). The Jews have established, with their eyes that they killed Him and crucified Him. The Gospel (*al-Injīl*) expressed a similar [view to] that and that [view is that] they took Him down from the cross and buried Him. The Jews and the Christians agree on [the fact] that He was killed and His concealment was not in the literal meaning (*al-ẓāhir*) of the verse, except in His departure from the world due to the killing. It is said in the Qur'ān that He was raised to heaven, but His rise to heaven is not like the concealment of the seventh. And also that He completed His mission before His departure from the world [while] the seventh [*nāṭiq*] did not complete his mission in his concealment, but the call in his name [lasts] until the time of his appearance.⁸⁹⁹

The account goes on to depict the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in symbolic and allegorical terms.⁹⁰⁰

16.1.3 Observations

Al-Nasafī states that Jesus' ascent to heaven, absence and future return provides a typology in which to understand the *Qā'im*'s absence and return. Understanding that Jesus' ascent to heaven is related to and follows His crucifixion; Abū Ḥātim argues against Jesus' crucifixion and rejects the prophetic typology espoused by al-Nasafī.⁹⁰¹

As Abū Ḥātim sees it, the Jews and the Christians say that Jesus was crucified and the Qur'an says that He was not crucified. No attempt is made to reconcile these contradictory truth claims; he does not use Neo-Platonic philosophy nor does he explain a *bāṭin* (esoteric) meaning nor does he say that the

⁸⁹⁹ Abū Ḥātim, *Iṣlāḥ*, 243.

⁹⁰⁰ Ivanow, *Studies*, 156.

⁹⁰¹ Nomoto, *Early Isma'īlī Thought*, 251-2.

Jews and the Christians corrupted their Scripture; Abū Ḥātim says that Allah Himself said that Jesus was not crucified; case closed. He argues that Jesus is different from the *Qā'im* because His ascension is not the same as the *Qā'im's* occultation and His mission is complete while the *Qā'im's* mission continues. It may be that Abū Ḥātim argues against Jesus' crucifixion because he does not want anybody thinking that the analogy made by al-Nasafī means that the Imām was crucified. Abū Ḥātim espouses an eschatology in which the *Qā'im*, not Jesus, has a Second Coming.

The *Kitāb al-maḥṣūl* of al-Nasafī is non-extant and the *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ* of Abū Ḥātim does not quote al-Nasafī, so we cannot be sure exactly what al-Nasafī said. Since no evidence has been uncovered that demonstrates that al-Nasafī actually mentioned Jesus' crucifixion, Lawson's statement 'It is also important to observe that this highlights the important fact that al-Nasafī himself believed in the historicity of the crucifixion'⁹⁰² is questionable.

In the *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ*, Abū Ḥātim states that Allah imposed the image of Jesus upon the one who pointed Him out to the Jews and that the Jews crucified that man instead. This contrasts with his *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, which unequivocally affirms the crucifixion of Jesus and calls into question the scholarship of Abū Ḥātim. Since the

⁹⁰²Lawson, 82-3.

denial in his *Kitāb al-iṣlāḥ* immediately follows his reference to Q. 4.157, it must be understood that he was interpreting the Qur'an here, but he was arguing for the Ismā'īlī Imāmate against Rhazes.

16.2 Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī (d. 361/971)

16.2.1 Background

Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī (d. after 361/971) returned from *hajj* in 322/934 to become the Ismā‘īlī *dā‘ī* in Sīstān for almost forty years until he was executed by the governor Khalaf b. Aḥmad. At first, he did not acknowledge the Fāṭimid caliphate, but later he became the first Persian *dā‘ī* to argue that the Fāṭimid caliph represented the absent seventh imām. When al-Sijistānī brought the Persian Ismā‘īlīs under Fāṭimid influence, the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mu‘izz adopted the cosmology of al-Sijistānī. He remained the most important Ismā‘īlī scholar for the next century.⁹⁰³

Al-Sijistānī wrote *Kitāb al-maqālīd*, *Ithbāt al-nubuwwa*, *Kitāb al-yanābī‘*, *Kitāb al-iftikhār*, *Sullam al-najāt*, and *Kashf al-mahjūb* during the reign of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mu‘izz. These six internally consistent works address the relationship of the Intellect, the Soul, the *nuṭaqā’* (Speaking-Prophets), and the *asās* (Founder).⁹⁰⁴

Among the groundbreaking teachings of al-Sijistānī is that God is so unknowable that not only can He not be known through anthropomorphisms, He is

⁹⁰³ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 15; Paul Ernest Walker, *Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī: Intellectual Missionary* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), xxiii; P. E. Walker, “Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī,” *El*² says that he returned to Rayy then to Khurasan then left to Sijistān upon the death of al-Nasafī, while Daftary, *The Isma‘ilis: Their History and Doctrines*, 168, 180, 242; p. 168 says that he succeeded al-Nasafī as *dā‘ī* of Khurasan and Abū Ḥātim as *dā‘ī* of Rayy; W. Madelung, “Ḳarmaṭī,” *El*².

⁹⁰⁴ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 18; Walker, “al-Sijistānī”.

both not a thing and He is not not a thing. He stated that ‘God’s Word, His *logos*, produces existent beings.’ Written in 350/961, the *Kitāb al-yanābī’* includes forty treatises addressed to well-educated believers that cites Aristotle, the Gospels, and the Qur’an to support his arguments. Although the Fāṭimid Caliph al-Mu‘izz needed scholars to expand doctrine to incorporate two sets of seven imāms, *al-Yanābī’* is not a defence of imāms, nor is it *kalām*, nor doctrine, but rather it is a work of rational philosophy.⁹⁰⁵ My translation follows.

16.2.2 Translation and analysis of the thirty-first wellspring: on the meaning of the cross for the religious community of Jesus

Truly, the cross is the name for the piece of wood upon which the Man [was] crucified where all [of the] people saw Him; what [was] crucified upon it [was] the dead body, and it [was] Jesus, upon Him be peace. [Jesus] notified His community that the Master of the Resurrection, of whom He is his sign, [will] then reveal the structural truths (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the sacred laws (*Sharā’i’*) [and] the people [will] know it and they [will] not deny it. It is just as when all people saw the One Who was crucified; they [will] come to know Him and understand His form, although before that, most of them were ignorant of Him. Because of this meaning, His day is called ‘The Day of Revealing’, just as [Allāh] said ‘on the Day when man’s very being shall be bared to the bone, and when they [who now deny the truth] shall be called upon to prostrate themselves [Q. 68.42]’. The One Who was crucified on the piece of wood became revealed, although He was previously concealed.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰⁵ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 24-30; Walker, “al-Sijistānī”; quote from Walker, *Wellsprings*, 28.

⁹⁰⁶ Arabic text in Abū Ya‘qūb Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-yanābī’*, in Henry Corbin, *Trilogie Ismaélienne* (Téhéran: Département d’Iranologie de l’Institut francoiranien, 1961), 73-4.

Walker comments ‘The cross is meant to direct attention to the historical aspect of prophecy by emphasising Jesus’s role as harbinger or prefiguring of the messiah and of the time of disclosing the hidden truth. By looking back, he is in fact, looking forward.’⁹⁰⁷ In typological fashion, Jesus’ unveiling of the knowledge and wisdom of long-hidden sacred truths is portrayed as a type of the forthcoming *Qā’im*.⁹⁰⁸ This typology would be meaningless if the crucifixion was a myth or a lie; the typology only makes sense when it is firmly grounded in the historic fact of Jesus’ crucifixion. Al-Sijistānī repeats the idea that Jesus was the ‘lord of the resurrection’ from his *Kashf al-mahjūb*.⁹⁰⁹

The other meaning: He [Jesus] told His community that it is easy for the Master of the Resurrection and his successors to make public the explanation [*bayān*] for everything. Although religion was without conjecture in its explanation, it is just like the divine laws (*ḥudūd*)⁹¹⁰ uniting in this dead piece of wood.⁹¹¹

The next paragraph includes an unequivocal unembellished statement that Jesus was crucified by His opponents.

The piece of wood upon which He (Jesus) was crucified was produced by [a group] other than His own, then they crucified Him on it obviously naked. Nevertheless, the explanation is that the *Qā’im* and his successors, on them

⁹⁰⁷ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 177.

⁹⁰⁸ Nomoto, *Early Ismā ‘ilī Thought*, 270.

⁹⁰⁹ Nomoto, *Early Ismā ‘ilī Thought*, 270 n. 24.

⁹¹⁰ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 94 defines *ḥudūd* as ‘ranks of hierarchies’.

⁹¹¹ Abū Ya‘qūb Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-yanabī’*, in Henry Corbin, *Trilogie Ismaélienne*, 74.

be peace, were only revealing the *sharā'i* of the messengers [who] had already come before him. So, [the cross] becomes a clear sign and evidence for all of the divine laws (*ḥudūd*). Venerating a thing [the cross] became a duty to them [the Christians] like our [Muslim] veneration of the *shahāda*.⁹¹²

One does not expect to find a justification for the Christian practice of venerating the cross within Muslim scholarship, but al-Sijistānī even goes further. He proceeds to explain a Muslim practice using the cross as a model and it is not just some peripheral practice, but rather it is used as an analogy with the Islamic profession of faith. If Jesus' crucifixion is a myth or a lie, the explanation of al-Sijistānī falls upon deaf ears.

16.2.3 Translation and analysis of the thirty-second wellspring: on the agreement of the cross with the *shahāda*

The four points of the cross represent the Master of divine inspiration, the Master of interpretation, the Master of natural composition, and the Master of scriptural composition. These will be explained following the translation of the paragraph.

The *shahāda* is built on the denial and the affirmation, beginning with the denial and ending with the affirmation; likewise, the cross is two pieces of wood: a piece of wood standing by itself, and another piece of wood, [which can] not be standing unless another is standing. The *shahāda* is four words; likewise, the cross has four tips. The tip which is fixed in the ground, its position (*manzil*) is held [by] the Master of Interpretation (*ta'wīl*), in whom the souls of the seekers (*murtādīn*) are established. The tip which stands opposite it, elevated in the air, holds the position of the Master of

⁹¹²*Ibid.*

Corroboration (*ta'yīd*),⁹¹³ in whom the souls of the adherents (*mu'ayyadīn*) are established. Both of the tips which are in the middle, a right side and a left side, are in the manner of (*'alā*) the Follower (*tālī*)⁹¹⁴ and the Speaking-Prophet (*nāṭiq*);⁹¹⁵ one of whom is the Master of Composition (*tarkīb*)⁹¹⁶ and the other is the Master of Compilation (*ta'līf*);⁹¹⁷ one of them is opposite the other. The tip is standing (*qā'im*)⁹¹⁸ for the Preceder (*sābiq*)⁹¹⁹ [who] is reinforcing (*mamudd*) all of the letters.⁹²⁰

Some explanation of technical terms is necessary here. The Master of divine inspiration is the Intellect or the Preceder, the Master of interpretation is the Founder, the Master of natural composition is the Follower or the Soul, and the Master of scriptural composition is the Speaking Prophet.⁹²¹ In order of importance, the four wellsprings of wisdom are: Intellect or reason or mind, Soul, Speaking Prophets, and the Founder of interpretation or executor.⁹²² Since the Soul and prophecy are relatively equal, they are represented on the horizontal beam. It is

⁹¹³ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 95 defines *ta'yīd* as 'Divine Inspiration'.

⁹¹⁴ Peerwani, Latimah Parwin, 'Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī', vol. 2, in *An Anthology of Persian Philosophy: Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age from Jābir ibn Ḥayyān to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Mehdi Aminrazavi, & M. R. Jozi (I.B. Taurus, 2008), 142 defines 'Follower' as 'Soul'.

⁹¹⁵ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 95 defines *nāṭiq* as Speaking-prophet.

⁹¹⁶ Peerwani, "Sijistānī", 142 defines *tarkīb* as 'natural structures'.

⁹¹⁷ HW defines *ta'līf* as 'combining'; Walker, *Wellsprings*, 95 defines *ta'līf* as 'Scriptural Compilation'; Peerwani, "Sijistānī", 142 defines *ta'līf* as 'codification [of religious ordinances]'.

⁹¹⁸ Note the play on words.

⁹¹⁹ Peerwani, "Sijistānī", 142 defines *sābiq* as 'Intellect'.

⁹²⁰ Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-yanābī*, in Henry Corbin, *Trilogie Ismaélienne*, 75.

⁹²¹ Walker, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī, 32.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, 30.

upon these four elements that al-Sijistānī builds his entire epistemology. Had he not been certain of the historicity of Jesus' crucifixion and that his audience would have unhesitatingly accepted its historicity, he could have used the four seasons, or four elements, or four directions for his illustration. The epistemology of al-Sijistānī is no simple matter nor is it central to our study, but some elaboration thereof serves to illustrate his surprising reliance on Jesus' cross.

The *Shahāda* is seven syllables; likewise, the cross is four angles and three terminations. The four angles and the three terminations are an indication of the seven Imāms in His (Jesus') era, just as the seven syllables in the *Shahāda* [are an] indication of the Imāms of the era of our Speaking-Prophet (*nāṭiq*) (Muḥammad), upon him be peace. Each of its tips⁹²³ has three tips for itself; the total is twelve; likewise, the *Shahāda* is twelve letters. Just as it [the *Shahāda*] is compiled from three letters, without [counting] repetitions, the cross is likewise a composition of surfaces and lines and angles; the lines are like the *alif*, the surfaces are like the *lām*, and the angles are like the *hā'*.⁹²⁴ Just as the *Shahāda* only becomes complete by its connection with Muḥammad, may the prayers of Allāh be upon him and his family; likewise, the cross is only honoured after the master of that era was found upon it.

We described a manner of oneness of the cross with the *Shahāda* in its sections and its parts.⁹²⁵

⁹²³ The four tips of the cross.

⁹²⁴ These are the three letter of the *Shahāda*.

⁹²⁵ Abū Ya'qūb Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-yanābī'*, in Henry Corbin, *Trilogie Ismaélienne*, 75-6.

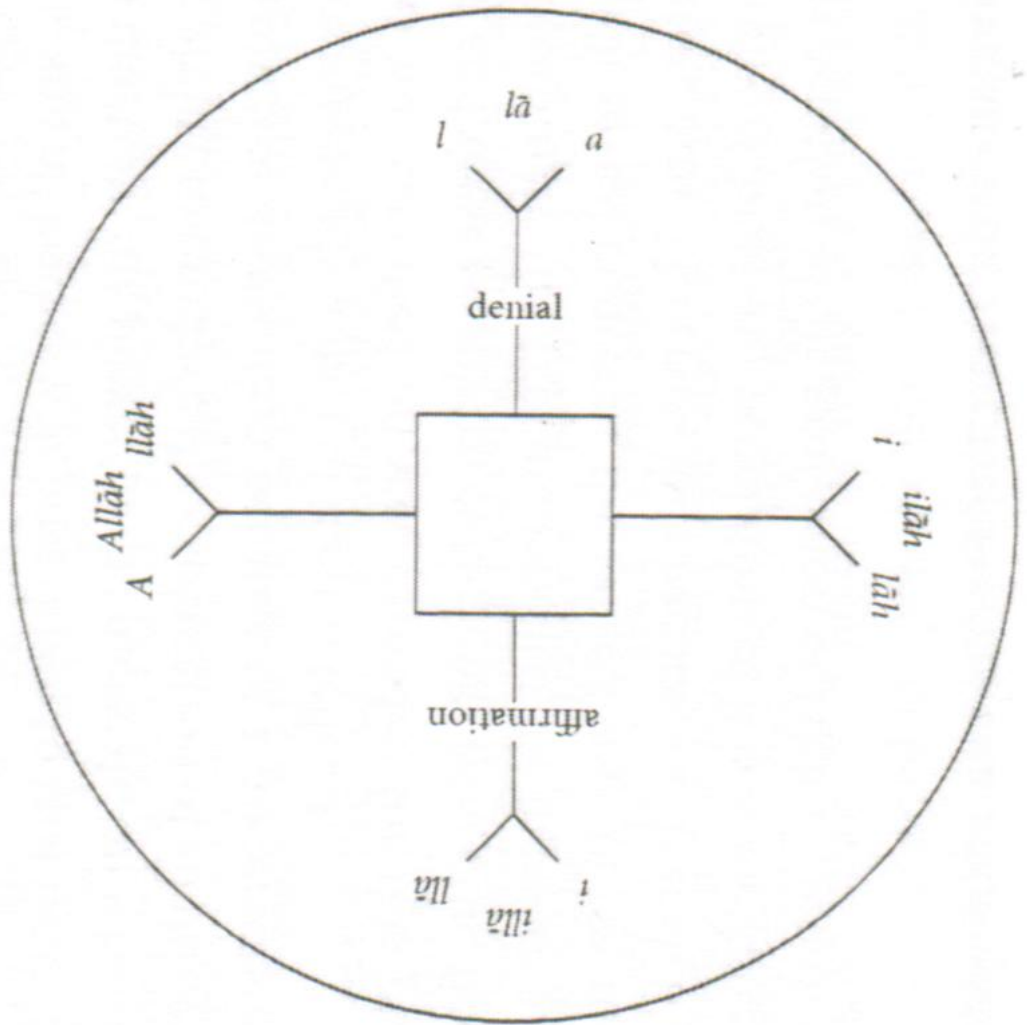


Image scanned from *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*,

ed. Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh & Kutub Kassam (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008),

198.

16.2.4 Observations

Lawson says that ‘Both al-Sijistānī and Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī uphold the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus’.⁹²⁶ Al-Sijistānī uses the cross and Jesus’ crucifixion as a typology, both to explain why Christians venerate the cross and as a model for the Islamic *shahāda*. The historicity of Jesus’ crucifixion is not questioned, but rather it is essential in making sense of the typology, for a typology based on a myth or lie would be meaningless or harmful. But we do not have to guess whether al-Sijistānī held a position on the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus.

His *Kashf al-mahjūb*, the ‘earliest systematic exposition of Ismā‘īlī philosophy’,⁹²⁷ explains the seven sources of *gnosis*.⁹²⁸ While the original manuscript is non-extant, we have a 5th/11th century anonymous Persian translation/paraphrase.⁹²⁹ The second subsection of Issue Six in Chapter Six, which is entitled ‘Why Descent [from Heaven] Is Kindred to Jesus, Among All The Prophets’, states:

Each one among the Prophets was granted triumph over his enemies so that his rule could stand, except Jesus, who indeed experienced hardship from

⁹²⁶ Lawson, 84.

⁹²⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr with Mehdi Aminravzavi, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

⁹²⁸ Nasr, *Anthology*, 73

⁹²⁹ Nasr, *Anthology*, 72, 79.

his enemies and left this world without having received any help against his enemies.⁹³⁰

As an aside, Walker notes that the twelve points symbolise the twelve apostles.⁹³¹

Al-Sijistānī states that following Jesus' crucifixion, his resurrection unveiled *gnosis* in the same manner that the *Qā'im* will unveil hidden knowledge.⁹³² The importance of his *Kashf* is that it demonstrates consistency with his *Kitāb*.

⁹³⁰ Nasr, *Anthology*, 114; *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2, 2008, 118. Walker, Abū Ya'qub al-Sijistānī, 118 says that the title is "That the lineage of Jesus, alone of all the prophets, descended from above", but I did not find it in Abū Ya'qub al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (Tehran: Institut franco-iranien, 1949). This same translation appeared in *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature*, 128 and 'Unveiling of the Hidden' in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2, ed. S. H. Nasr with M. Aminrazavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 71-124, 102-4, 108-16 and will also appear in his upcoming *Creation and Resurrection: Divine Unity and the Universal Process*, but they place it in Section 5 Division 6 entitled 'Why Jesus, among the prophets whose descent is traced to coming down [from Heaven]'.
⁹³¹ Walker, *Wellsprings*, 178.
⁹³² Lawson, 84-85.

16.3 Discussion

Abū Ḥātim argues against a typology relating Jesus to the seventh Imām that al-Nasafī argued. We do not know what al-Nasafī said about the crucifixion. Al-Sijistānī constructs two typologies from the cross and Jesus, one to explain Christian veneration of the cross and the other to explain the Islamic *shahāda* while his *Kashf* explains that nobody intervened to prevent the crucifixion of Jesus.

Like al-Sijistānī, Rūmī utilizes the cross as a symbol:

the four-pointed cross becomes a symbol of the four elements of which the world is made:

Far be the portico of joy from fire and water and dust and wind!
The composition of the true confessors of Unity [oneness] be as far
away from those
Four simple elements as from the cross! (D 7215)⁹³³

Yet Rūmī uses the cross both as a symbol and to deny the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus. Rūmī states that:

A treacherous vizier wanted to cheat Jesus and went out in the hope of becoming the leader of the people who followed Christ, but because he looked like Jesus it was he who was crucified in Jesus' place.⁹³⁴

Rūmī proceeds to explain that 'the true believer does not think that Christ has been crucified (D 7642)'.⁹³⁵

⁹³³Schimmel, "Rūmī's Verse", 149. The number refers to the *Mathnavī*.

⁹³⁴*Ibid.*, 149-50.

⁹³⁵*Ibid.*, 149.

**Chapter 17-Who or what is the subject of *shubbiha*?
(538/1144)**

The last line of reasoning to develop was the more important grammatical question, the one that should have been the first question asked: who or what is the subject of *shubbiha*? Since *shubbiha* is a third person masculine singular form II passive perfect verb, its subject is hidden.

17.1 *Al-Zamakhsharī* (d. 538/1144)

17.1.1 Background

Abu'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar b. Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Khwārazm al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) was a famous Mu'tazilī grammarian, who wrote a commentary on the Qur'an. His background is well known to scholars of Islamic Studies.

17.1.2 Translation and analysis of the comments of the *al-Kashshaf* of al-Zamakhsharī on Q. 4.157

Al-Zamakhsharī comments on Q. 4.157 as follows:

It was related (*ruwiya*) that groups of Jews reviled Him [Jesus] and reviled His mother, so He invoked Allāh against them:

O Allāh, You are My Lord, and by Your word You created me. O Allāh, curse those who reviled Me and reviled My mother.

So Allāh transformed those who had reviled [them] into monkeys and pigs. Then the Jews united to kill Him, so Allāh informed Him that He [would] raise Him to heaven and cleanse Him from having associated with the Jews. So He [Jesus] said to His disciples:

Who of you agrees to have My likeness (*shabah*) cast upon him and then be killed and crucified and enter paradise?

A man among them said:

I [do].

Then Allāh cast His [Jesus'] likeness on him, and he was killed and crucified.⁹³⁶

Lawson states that 'Although no *asānīd* [*isnāds*] are used, al-Zamakhsharī does begin his commentary on this verse with a reference to tradition by

⁹³⁶ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 396.

introducing his discussion with the technical term *ruwiya* ('it is related').⁹³⁷ Groups of Jews reviled Jesus and His mother, presumably because Mary was having the baby Jesus out of wedlock, so Jesus appealed to Allah in order to preserve the reputation of His mother and of Himself by calling upon Allah's power to transform the groups of reviling Jews into unclean animals, monkeys and pigs. The report about transformation into monkey and pigs is also seen in the earlier work of al-Tha'labī. The remaining Jews were so angered at Jesus because He had invoked Allah's power against them that they wanted to kill Him. As seen in the earlier account of al-Zajjāj, Jesus asks for a volunteer to be crucified as a substitute for Himself.

This account conflates the reviling of Mary, which occurred in Jesus' infancy, with His crucifixion over thirty years later. Allah demonstrates his transformative powers twice, changing groups of revilers into monkeys and pigs, and transforming an unidentified innocent volunteer into the likeness of Jesus. A second report of al-Zamakhsharī is as follows:

It is said [that] a man [Judas] was behaving hypocritically [toward] Jesus. When they [the Jews] wanted to kill Him [Jesus], he [Judas] said 'I will point you to him'. So he entered Jesus' house, then Jesus was raised up and His

⁹³⁷Lawson, 100.

likeness was cast onto the hypocrite [Judas] and they came into him [Judas] and then they killed him, thinking that he [Judas] was Jesus.⁹³⁸

This second account does not expand on the first, but rather it is a different account altogether. Judas hands Jesus over to the Jews only to find the house empty whereupon Judas is made to look so like Jesus that when the Jews enter, they mistake Judas for Jesus and kill him instead. Judas is labeled a hypocrite, yet Allah proves Himself to be the best of schemers.

Then they differed; [1] some of them said that He is God [and] it is not permissible to kill Him; [2] and some of them said that He has been killed and crucified; [3] and some of them said 'If this was Jesus, then where is our companion?' and 'If this was our companion, then where is Jesus?'; [4] and some of them said 'He [has been] raised to heaven'; [5] and some of them said 'The face is the face of Jesus, but the body is that of our companion'.⁹³⁹

Al-Zamakhsharī explains the confusion that befell the Jews by enumerating their five distinct memories of the crucifixion in much the same manner as al-Tha'labī did. These first three reports are not unique to al-Zamakhsharī.

Seemingly dissatisfied with substitution legends, al-Zamakhsharī turns to his field of expertise, grammar, to tackle a question that nobody else has asked, a question that is central to understanding the ambiguous phrase *shubbiha lahum*, which occurs only once in the Qur'an. He asks,

⁹³⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 396.

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 396.

(Then, if I say), ‘To what (is *shubbiha*) subject?’⁹⁴⁰

This means ‘what is the subject of *shubbiha lahum*?’⁹⁴¹ Since al-Zamakhsharī is critiquing substitution legends, the question behind the question is ‘who or what person or event was the subject that was made to appear differently than he or it actually was?’ That this is the question becomes evident from the answers he provides. Since *shubbiha* is a form II causative verb, it could be useful to know the identity of who is the ‘causer’ of *shubbiha*, but that seems to lie outside the scope of his inquiry. The various possibilities that al-Zamakhsharī discusses include the following:

[1] The subject of *shubbiha* is Jesus.

[2] *Shubbiha* refers to Judas.

[3] *Shubbiha lahum* means ‘It seemed so to them’.⁹⁴²

This is a very difficult discussion to decipher. Ayoub, Robinson, Lawson and Reynolds agree that the first possibility is that Jesus is the subject. Reynolds correctly says that this means that ‘Jesus was made to look like someone..., which would make nonsense of the substitution narratives’, but the other three add that it means that the substitute was transformed into the image of Jesus. All four agree

⁹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 396.

⁹⁴¹ Ayoub, *Christology* II, 100; Robinson, *Christ*, 134, Lawson, 102, Reynolds, *Dead*, 244n. 19.

⁹⁴² Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 396.

that the problem with the substitute being the subject, the second possibility, is

that he is not named in the Qur'an. The third possibility is that the phrase *shubbiha*

lahum is impersonal in some way. Ayoub interprets it as follows:

Thus it must refer to the preposition, 'to' (them), that is, 'they were made to imagine it'.⁹⁴³

Robinson says,

The verb is impersonal. It is like the common expression *khuyyila la-hu* ('It seemed to him'). It is as though what was said were (*waqa'a la-hum al-tashbiḥu*) ('the resemblance occurred to them').⁹⁴⁴

Lawson says,

'It [the affair of the crucifixion] was made obscure to them.' The gloss – perhaps an illustration from common parlance – *kḥuyyila ilayhi* is presented for *shubbiha lahum*. Thus, the following translation emerges: THEY KILLED HIM NOT NOR DID THEY CRUCIFY HIM, BUT THE AFFAIR WAS IMAGED SO TO THEM.⁹⁴⁵

Reynolds says that the phrase means:

But they became uncertain.⁹⁴⁶

Al-Zamakhsharī argues that the *hum* that is found in *lahum* refers to 'the Jews' who are the subject of the paragraph that starts in verse 153 and which describes the Jews as having been obstinate from the time of Moses until the time

⁹⁴³ Ayoub, *Christology* II, 100.

⁹⁴⁴ Robinson, *Christ*, 134.

⁹⁴⁵ Lawson, 102.

⁹⁴⁶ Reynolds, *Dead*, 244n. 19.

of Jesus, thus clearly showing that these Jews are the ‘they’ and the ‘them’ who are referenced often in this passage.

It is apparent that the two synonymous phrases that al-Zamakhsharī offers for *shubbiha lahum*--*khuyyila alayhi* and *waqa‘a lahum al-tashbbih*--are just as ambiguous as *shubbiha lahum*. His conclusion is that *shubbiha* refers to the one killed in one of the two substitution legends, either the volunteer or Judas, a solution, which he had previously rejected. He does not say nor is it clear how one saying is pointing to another. Following his line of reasoning, we must understand that he has rejected his grammatical explanation in favour of a substitution legend in which Judas is crucified instead of Jesus. He explains that the Jews and Christians doubt this explanation because they need a divine sign and then he shows that the Qur’an provides just the needed divine sign in the form of the word *mā* (not), which proves that Jesus was not crucified.

17.1.3 Observations

We have already seen that Ayoub is incorrect in saying that al-Zamakhsharī is ‘the first to seriously question the substitutionist ideal altogether’,⁹⁴⁷ for we have seen several earlier objections. While Ayoub states that ‘he (al-Zamakhsharī)

⁹⁴⁷ Ayoub, “Christology, II”, 100.

The Cross of Christ: Islamic Perspectives provides new arguments for many commentators after him',⁹⁴⁸ Ayoub does not name any of those commentators and my research indicates that only substitution legends remain a part of Muslim scholarship in the following centuries. Working from the 1966 Beirut edition of *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmid al-tanzīl*, Lawson includes a *ḥadīth* referring to Q. 3.55.⁹⁴⁹ While Lawson states that 'we find al-Zamakhsharī going to great lengths to grapple with the sort of questions introduced by al-Ṭūsī,' neither edition of *al-Kashshāf* deals with whether it is conceivable that Allah cast the image of one man upon another man.

While we have seen grammatical analysis before, it has focused on the *hu* in the second *qatalūhu*. Al-Zamakhsharī is the first Muslim scholar to venture into the interpretation of the difficult grammar of *shubbiha lahum*, but unfortunately without significant results. Al-Zamakhsharī rejects two substitution legends and then he explains that the Jews (and presumably the Christians) are so confused that they hold several distinct points of view. Then he proceeds into his field of expertise to consider various possible grammatical explanations. To the best of my knowledge, al-Zamakhsharī is the only Muslim scholar who focused on the grammar of *shubbiha lahum*, but as was the case with the other three grammarians;

⁹⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁹Lawson, 101.

his grammatical analysis did not play a meaningful role in his exegesis. He too concluded with substitution legends.

In light of the above analysis, it seems that Lawson is unaware of the full scope of the comments of al-Zamakhsharī concerning Q. 4.157 when Lawson interprets them as follows:

If it is ‘the affair’ that is rendered obscure and not Jesus who is ‘made similar’ to someone else or someone else who is ‘made similar’ to Jesus, then this makes room for a break with the substitution legend and its use in solving the linguistic problem in the Qur’an. This amounts, in the event, to the ‘grammatical acceptance’ of the possibility of the Isma‘ili *tafsīr* presented earlier, quite apart from what this author may have thought of the Shi‘a. In the case of that exegesis, what appeared TO THEM was only the humanity (*nāsūt*) and not the divine eternity (*lāhūt*) of Jesus.⁹⁵⁰

Therefore, his following comment is likewise rather sweeping:

It is clear that this interpretation was the most significant development in the specific genre of *tafsīr* heretofore encountered, and, as will be seen, it could be questioned whether anything comparable has occurred since.⁹⁵¹

⁹⁵⁰ Lawson, 102.

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

Reflections on the works discussed in Part III

Part III studies a selection of relevant medieval Muslim scholars who wrote from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. While many scholars subscribe to Watt's conclusion that the formative period of Islam culminated at the start of the tenth century, most of the scholarship in Part III follows the 235/850 end of the *miḥna* (inquisition) and the 260/874 occultation of the Twelfth Shī'ī Imām. The scholarship studied in Part III is written in Arabic in 'Greater Persia'. This type of innovative theological scholarship is less common in the Persian cultural sphere after the Mongol conquests.

III.A *Four grammarians plus one*

There are four scholars who use grammar to explain terms found in Q. 4.157. Al-Farrā' uses grammar to explain that the last phrase of Q. 4.157, *wa mā qatalūhu*, combined as it is with *yaqīnān*, refers to 'certain knowledge', whilst the first occurrence of the phrase *mā qatalūhu* means 'they did not kill Him'. Importantly, he then reverts to explaining Q. 3.54-5 with a substitution legend.

Al-Zajjāj uses grammar to say that the *hu* of the second *qatalūhu* refers to knowledge and that *qatalūhu yaqīnān* means 'They knew it for sure'. He then reports two contradictory substitution legends without making any effort to reconcile them.

Al-Tha‘labī includes the grammatical report of al-Farrā’ along with a dozen substitution legends in his *tafsīr*. Al-Tha‘labī is the only scholar in this thesis to mention that Joshua b. Madīn was crucified instead of Jesus. He also introduces Ṭiṭyānūs as a substitute who later appears in the works of al-Rāzī under the name of Ṭiṭāyūs.

Al-Zamakhsharī considers two substitution legends. He then evaluates three possible grammatical explanations of *shubbiha lahum* and then he accepts his second substitution legend in which Judas is the substitute. These four grammarians have decided that substitution legends, not their far-fetched grammatical ‘solutions’, are the key to the meaning of Q. 4.157.

Although not a grammarian, al-Baqlī is discussed here because he uses the interesting technical terms *lāhūt*, *nāsūt*, *iltibās*, *tashbīh* and *makr*. Nonetheless, he reports that an unnamed substitute was crucified instead of Jesus.

III.B The crucifixion is the foil of five polemical arguments

Ibn al-Rāwandī and al-Warrāq argue that since there are more and better reports about the crucifixion than there are about Muhammad’s miracles, one either has to accept the crucifixion of Jesus or reject the miracles of Muhammad. Jesus’ crucifixion is a foil of that argument, an argument in which Muhammad’s prophecy is likewise not the issue. Ibn al-Rāwandī has consistently been

interpreted as arguing against prophecy, while his real concern here was to stop the use of *ḥadīth* in exegesis. He himself explains the Qur'an by the Qur'an in the second paragraph of *Majlis* 520. He proffered his argument against the *ahl al-ḥadīth* at the very time and place where they were rising to power and assembling compilations of *ḥadīths*. Because the Mu'tazilīs failed to grasp the seriousness of the threat of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* and the essence of the argument of Ibn al-Rāwandī, they did not prepare themselves for the Ash'arīs, who subordinated reason to *ḥadīth*. Similarly, there are other cases in which he argues against prophecy or Muhammad's prophecy in particular, but his real target is the legitimacy of the Ismā'īlī Imām. He clearly opposes the Ismā'īlīs and the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, but his positions on prophecy and the crucifixion of Jesus are not clear. Likewise, the position of his mentor, al-Warrāq, has not come down to us.

Al-Shirāzī responds to Ibn al-Rāwandī two centuries later and 800 miles away. He creates a paradox based upon the divinity of Jesus and then argues that Jesus must be in heaven because divinity cannot die. The logic of his argument requires him to deny the crucifixion, which he does by attributing a *ḥadīth* to Muhammad that says that the Jews and Christians had lied about the crucifixion.

Abū Ḥātim was involved in two disagreements in which the cross was brought into the conversation. Rhazes says that the Qur'an has no credibility

because it conflicts with the Bible, so Abū Ḥātim argues in his *al-Nubuwwa* that there is no conflict because Jesus sacrificed His body unto death. Al-Nasafī constructs a typology in which the hidden Imām is just like Jesus, so Abū Ḥātim argues in his *al-Iṣlāḥ* that just like the hidden Imām, Jesus was not crucified. Since Abū Ḥātim affirms the crucifixion in his debate with Rhazes and he denies the crucifixion in his *al-Iṣlāḥ* addressed to al-Nasafī, he is clearly inconsistent. Since he denies the crucifixion by citing the actual Qur’anic verse in question, while his debate with Rhazes is philosophical in nature, his denial can be taken to be what he, as a Muslim exegete, actually believes. His contrary positions on the crucifixion are resolved by understanding that Abū Ḥātim is not at all concerned with the crucifixion of Jesus, but that he is arguing for the legitimacy of the Ismā’īlī Imām in both cases.

Al-Nasafī argues that the fifth and seventh Nāṭiqs vanished to heaven and will return to earth, but he does not mention the crucifixion. Rhazes argues that the Qur’an conflicts with the Bible on the matter of the crucifixion. He is not concerned with which one is correct; he is arguing that man should rely upon reason, not revelation. Both threaten the legitimacy of the Ismā’īlī Imāmate. Because their works are non-extant and because the works in which their

opponents mention them do not explicitly quote them affirming the crucifixion of Jesus, we cannot be certain of how or if they explain the meaning of Q. 4.157.

Lawson accurately cites the pseudo-Ghazālī work entitled *al-Radd al-jamīl* and the '*Alā l'Naṣārā*' by the Zaydī al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī. However, the statements he quotes are foils of polemical arguments that these scholars later argue against within these same works. These are not affirmations of the crucifixion, but rather they are selective, out of context quotations.

III.C Is it reasonable to rely on one's sense perception in normal times? (i.e. not during the times of a prophet)

Al-Ṭūsī includes a report in his *tafsīr* by the Mu'tazilī al-Jubbā'ī that raises the question of whether it is conceivable that Allah can cast the image of one person upon another person so convincingly that the two of them would become indistinguishable. Three Muslim scholars answer that it is conceivable. Al-Ṭūsī answers that such a thing is only conceivable for the Mu'tazilīs during the time of a prophet, but that the Twelvers can also conceive of such a miracle happening to a saint or occurring because Imāms are virtuous or because the consensus of the community cannot be wrong. Al-Ghazālī argues that those who live in ordinary times can trust their senses, but that those who live in the extraordinary times of a prophet, such as when Moses turned a staff into a snake or when Allah protected Jesus from the Jews who wanted to kill Him, have to rely on revelation, rather than

upon sense perception. Al-Rāzī answers that it is conceivable during the time of a prophet. Al-Ṭūsī includes nine substitution legends in his *tafsīr* while al-Rāzī mentions seven. While the question of whether it is conceivable that Allah could have cast the image of Jesus upon another man so convincingly that the other man was mistaken for Jesus and crucified in his place may have been an interesting question, the commentators who respond to the question still explain Q. 4.157 with substitution legends.

III.D Affirmations of the crucifixion in non-exegetical literature by or about the Ismāʿīlīs

Four works of Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman that mention the crucifixion of Jesus have survived. His esoteric *Taʿwīl sūrat al-nisāʾ* shows that the inner meaning of Q. 4.157 is that the Jews did not recognize that Jesus was their Imām, implying that that is why they crucified Jesus. The *Kitāb al-ʿālim waʾl-ghulām* of Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman objects to terminating the continuous line of prophets at Muhammad because doing so allows ʿAbbāsīd rulers to continue killing prophets, echoing the accusation that the Jews killed Jesus. His *Kitāb al-fatarāt waʾl-qirānāt* states that the entire cosmos is dependent upon the sun and the moon that originated in the two lines of the cross of Jesus. Typologies based on the cross only make sense if he accepts the historicity of the crucifixion. His *Sarāʾir* provides that

unequivocal account of the crucifixion of the Son of God followed by His resurrection.

The Book of Highest Initiation is an anonymous tract that mocks the secret initiation rites of the Ismā'īlīs and affirms the killing of Jesus, presumably by crucifixion. The *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* provides an unequivocal account of the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of the *nāsūt* of Jesus, which includes both His human body (*jasad*) and His immortal soul (*rūḥ*), while His divine nature (*lāhūt*) escapes that fate. Al-Sijistānī constructs two typologies from the cross of Christ, one to explain Christian veneration of the cross and the other to explain the *shahāda*. These typologies are made credible because his *Kashf* acknowledges the crucifixion by stating that nobody intervened to prevent the crucifixion of Jesus.

III.E Summary of the reflections of the scholars discussed in Part III

In summary, there are only four affirmations of the crucifixion of Jesus. However, the *Book of Highest Initiation*, the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, the *Sarā'ir* of al-Yaman and the *Kashf al-mahjūb* of al-Sijistānī are not exegetical works; they do not explain what Q. 4.157 means. It is not known what al-Warrāq, Ibn al-Rāwandī, Rhazes, al-Nasafī or al-Jubbā'ī actually wrote, but even their opponents do not say that they affirmed the crucifixion. While al-Ghazālī says that it is conceivable that Allah might transform someone into the image of Jesus, he does not say that He did

so. Al-Shirāzī, al-Qāsim al-Rassī and the pseudo-Ghazālī deny the crucifixion

through means other than substitution legends. Al-Farrā', al-Zajjāj, al-Tha'labī, al-

Zamakhsharī, Abū Ḥātim, al-Ṭūsī, al-Rāzī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī explain Q. 4.157

with substitution legends.

The four works that affirm the crucifixion are all by Ismā'īlīs or about them.

However, not all Ismā'īlīs affirm the crucifixion. Abū Ḥātim uses a substitution

legend to deny the crucifixion and al-Shirāzī attributes a *ḥadīth* that says that the

Christians and Jews lied about the crucifixion to Muhammad. Because Ismā'īlī

exegetical literature is sparse and since they are known for obtaining the *bāṭin*

(hidden) meaning from the text rather than *ẓāhir* (obvious) meaning, it is difficult

to be certain of their position on what the Qur'an says about the crucifixion.

III.F The legitimacy of using legends to explain the Qur'an

One inescapable conclusion is that the Qur'an does not say that Jesus' body,

but not His soul, died; it does not say that His human nature, but not His divine

nature, died; it does not say that Islam holds the *docetic* belief that since Jesus was

purely divine, He could not have died; it does not say that a substitute died in place

of Jesus. All of the medieval Muslim commentators studied in this thesis explain

their understanding of Q. 4.157 with substitution legends.

Part II has discussed the substitution legends of al-Ṭabarī that became received wisdom among Muslims. About half of the scholars in Lawson's book explain the crucifixion by almost exclusively relying upon these and similar substitution legends. All of the commentators who explored avenues of exegesis other than substitution legends concluded their explanation of the crucifixion with substitution legends. It is difficult to miss the centrality of substitution legends in commentaries that try to explain the meaning of Q. 4.157.

III.F.1 Medieval Muslim objections

Some of the problems inherent in the substitution legends that al-Ṭabarī uses to deny the crucifixion are mentioned in the observations at the end of Chapter 8. Three of the medieval Muslim scholars studied in Part III articulate their own profound objections to substitution legends. Ibn al-Rāwandī argues that because there is a vast array of reports concerning Jesus' crucifixion and only a small handful of reports about Muhammad's miracles, rejecting Jesus' crucifixion logically requires rejecting Muhammad's prophethood. Rhazes disparages the trustworthiness of the Qur'an by arguing that it conflicts with the Biblical account of the crucifixion that is affirmed by both Jews and Christians. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī raises several more compelling objections.

Al-Rāzī says that if Allah so compellingly cast the image of one man upon another man that those who saw the other man lost confidence in their sense perception, Allah would have been guilty of sophistry. Furthermore, this loss of confidence in one's sense perception eliminates the only reason that anybody would believe in the prophethood of Muhammad, *mutawātir* transmission of *ḥadīth* and of *Shari'a*. There are three ways that Jesus could have been rescued without Allah resorting to sophistry. Since the tip of Gabriel's wing is sufficient to protect all of humanity, it is sufficient to protect Jesus. Since Jesus had power over life and death, He could have killed the Jews who wanted to kill Him. Allah could have raised Jesus unto Himself, without casting the likeness of Jesus upon someone else. Al-Rāzī argues that Allah's attribute of wisdom leaves Him no quarter to also be the creator of ignorance and deception. Next, he repeats the objection of Ibn al-Rāwandī that was just mentioned. The last objection of al-Rāzī is that if the Jews tried to crucify someone they had mistaken for Jesus, that man would have objected by saying that He was not Jesus, but there are no reports to this effect. Al-Rāzī is incorrect about this last objection because both al-Ṭabarī and al-Tha'labī provide such reports and al-Rāzī repeated them. These three medieval Muslim scholars raised ten compelling objections to substitution legends.

III.F.2 Modern Muslim objections

The debate has continued into modern times. Muhammad Asad argues that there are many problems inherent in the nature of the reports themselves:

There exist, among Muslims, many fanciful legends telling us that at the last moment God substituted for Jesus a person closely resembling him (according to some accounts, that person was Judas), who was subsequently crucified in his place. However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Qur'an or in authentic Traditions, and the stories produced in this connection by the classical commentators must be summarily rejected.⁹⁵²

What he means by authentic Traditions is *ḥadīth*, but as he rightly points out, not one of the substitution legends is a *ḥadīth al-qudsī* spoken by both Allah and Muhammad or a *ḥadīth* spoken by Muhammad. Substitution legends are not found in any of the *ṣaḥīḥ* or *sunan* compilations. Furthermore, they are not found in *the Sīrat rasūl Allāh*. Most are not transmitted by a Companion of Muhammad or by one of the Successors. Al-Ṭabarī prefers a substitution legend transmitted by Wahb b. Munabbih that today's Muslims continue to hold in high regard. That substitution legend is considered to be one of the *Isrā'īliyyāt*, a type of story that the illustrious Ibn Kathīr says has no exegetical value.⁹⁵³

⁹⁵² Asad, Qur'an, note 171 to Q. 4.157.

⁹⁵³ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 57.

Even accepting these reports as being as credible as the *Isrā'īliyyāt* is problematic. Most reports about the crucifixion were transmitted among Christians, but substitution legends are not found in canonical Christian literature, although a few are found in heretical apocryphal Gnostic works.⁹⁵⁴ When so many canonical and heretical Christian reports were available and when the Jews had already rejected Islam *en masse*, it is particularly odd that reports from Jewish sources would be accepted against their Christian enemies on such an important issue. Some of the substitution legends that have made their way into commentaries are *āḥād ḥadīth*, reports with only a single *isnād*. Khaleel Mohammed states that ‘There is a consensus among the scholars of Islam that such a hadith cannot be used as a foundation for doctrine or matters about the unseen.’⁹⁵⁵ Al-

⁹⁵⁴Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia*, 147 mentions that ‘Basilides the Gnostic taught that “at the Crucifixion He [Jesus] changed form with Simon of Cyrene who had carried the cross. The Jews mistaking Simon for Jesus nailed him to the cross. Jesus stood by deriding their error before ascending to heaven”. In the third century, Mani of Persia, founder of the Manichaeen religion, taught that the son of the widow of Nain, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, was put to death in his place. According to another Manichaeen tradition, the devil, who was trying to crucify Jesus, was himself the victim of this switch. Photius (ca. 820-ca. 895) referred in his writings to an apocryphal book, *The Travels of Paul*, in which it was said that another was crucified in Jesus’ place’; Tröger, “Nag Hammadi,” 213-8 argues that the gnostic *Letter of Peter to Philip*, Nag Hammadi Codex [NHC] VIII, 2; *The Tripartite Tractate*, NHC I, 5; the *First Apocalypse of James*, NHC V, 3; *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, NHC, VII, 2; *The Apocalypse of Peter*, NHC, VII, 3 have an affinity to the idea that ‘it only seemed so’.

⁹⁵⁵Mohammed, “Overlooked Fatwa”, 382.

Ṭabarī prefers just such a *āḥād ḥadīth*. Goldziher argues that during the formative centuries of Islam, ‘strong opposition existed to certain kinds of *tafsīr*, namely mythological’.⁹⁵⁶ In his explanation of Q. 4.157, al-Ṭabarī relied almost exclusively on mythological *ḥadīths*.

A few things need to be said to conclude the discussion about these mythological *āḥād Isrā’īliyyāt*. An exception might be made to allow the venerable al-Ṭabarī to hold a personal opinion based on a mythological *āḥād Isrā’īliyyāt*, but such material does not provide a valid basis for reaching an *ijmā’* or issuing a *fatwā*. Commentators use the substitution legends as if they were authentic Traditions transmitted by Muhammad. Compelling reasons must be offered for why anybody should entertain or accept these specious legends rather than well-attested reports.

In spite of the virtually universal use of substitution legends in commentaries to explain the meaning of Q. 4.157, according to leading Muslim scholars, they do an exceptionally poor job of explaining that meaning. Ayoub says that,

⁹⁵⁶ Fred Leemhuis, “Origins and Early Development in the *tafsīr* Tradition” in ed. Andrew Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 16.

Muslim commentators have not been able convincingly to disprove the crucifixion. Rather, they have compounded the problem by adding the conclusion of their substitutionist theories.⁹⁵⁷

The popular Muslim scholar Muhammad Kamel Hussein argues that:

[T]he idea of a substitute for Christ is a very crude way of explaining the Qur'anic text. They had to explain a lot to the masses. No cultured Muslim believes in this nowadays.⁹⁵⁸

Muslim scholars also bring to light several moral problems that are inherent within substitution legends. Ayoub says that:

The substitutionist theory will not do, regardless of its form or purpose. First, it makes a mockery of divine justice and the primordial covenant of God with humanity, to guide human history to its final fulfillment. Would it be in consonance with God's covenant, his mercy and justice, to deceive humanity for so many centuries?...Muslim commentators have...been generally polemical.⁹⁵⁹

Substitution legends make Allah into the author of evil because Allah transformed someone into the likeness of another person so that the Jews crucified an innocent man. This leads to the further evil of creating the 'false' belief that Jesus has been crucified. Ayoub further argues:

It makes historical Christianity based on a divine deception which was not disclosed until the Qur'ān was revealed centuries later.⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁷ Ayoub, "Christology II", 116.

⁹⁵⁸ Muḥammad Kāmel Ḥussein, *Qaryah Ḍalmah*, tr. by Kenneth Cragg as *City of Wrong* (London, G. Bles, 1959), 231 cited by Mughal, p. 108.

⁹⁵⁹ Ayoub, "Christology II", 104.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

Perpetrating this ‘false’ belief makes Allah solely responsible for the eternal damnation of billions of Christians to Hell because He alone led them to this ‘false’ belief that Jesus had been crucified. Perpetrating ‘false’ beliefs is contrary to providing ‘clear guidance’,

«This is true guidance; those who reject their Lord’s revelations will have a woeful torment. (Q. 45:11)»

The Allah that most Muslims believe in is just not the kind of God who would deceive billions of people into a ‘false’ belief that leads to eternal damnation.

III.F.3 The ‘charge of history’

Ayoub argues that *shubbiha lahum* has ‘presented Muslims with a challenge... to answer convincingly the charge of history’.⁹⁶¹ The historical record about the crucifixion of Jesus is so good that ‘No serious modern historian doubts that Jesus was a historical figure and that he was crucified, whatever he may think of the faith in the resurrection’.⁹⁶² Lawson characterizes the Muslim position thusly:

[I]t would not only be a believing Christian who would say, ‘How can the Qur’an be a divine book when it so obviously has it wrong about the crucifixion of Jesus?’ And, if the Qur’an is not a divine book, then Islam is not a ‘true religion’.

Historians generally prefer contemporaneous eyewitness accounts or other early accounts rather than later accounts because early accounts are viewed as

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁹⁶² Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, 116.

being more authentic and less embellished. It is likewise invaluable to verify favourable accounts that originate from within one's own community by corroborating them with accounts from individuals who are outside or even hostile to that community. Therefore, in arbitrating the conflicting claims that the New Testament and the Qur'an make about the crucifixion of Jesus, it is best to consider accounts that were written within a century of that historical event. The four reliable reports that remain available today were written by Thallus, Mara son of Serapion, Flavius Josephus and Tacitus. These scholars provide accounts of the crucifixion, even though their communities were hostile to Christianity.

The work of Thallus who wrote in the 50s, only a couple of decades after the crucifixion, is now non-extant, but his *Histories* is mentioned in the work of the third-century Christian Julius Sextus Africanus who was cited by the ninth-century Byzantine historian George Syrellus.⁹⁶³ Concerning the crucifixion of Christ, Syrellus wrote that:

There fell upon the whole world a most fearful darkness, and with an earthquake, the rocks were rent and many places in Judea and the rest of the earth were thrown down. In the third book of his 'Histories', Thallus calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun. This, it seems to me, is contrary to reason. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the fourteenth day of the moon [when it is full] and what happened to our savior happened one day

⁹⁶³ Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, Jr. and John Dominic Crossan, *Historical Jesus in Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 37.

before Passover. Yet an eclipse takes place only when the moon comes under the sun [i.e., when it is not a full moon].⁹⁶⁴

Mara, Son of Serapion, was a Syrian writing in Latin after Vespian led the Romans to sack Samosata in 72AD and took him prisoner.

He alludes to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews as an act of divine vengeance for their having murdered Jesus; but he makes no direct mention of the name of Christ, and only designates him as the “wise king,” who, although put to death, still lived in the “wise laws which he promulgated.”⁹⁶⁵

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus describes Jesus’ crucifixion under Pilate in his *Antiquities*, written about CE 93/94.

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and men of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again at the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe, of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.⁹⁶⁶

⁹⁶⁴Dale C. Allison, Jr., “Thallus on the Crucifixion” in Amy-Jill Levine, Dale C. Allison, Jr. and John Dominic Crossan, *Historical Jesus in Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 405-6.

⁹⁶⁵ William Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum: Containing Remains of Bardesan, Meliton, Ambrose and Mara bar Serapion* (London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place, 1855), xiii.

⁹⁶⁶Flavius Josephus, *The Whole Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus*, tr. William Whiston, vol. 3 (Glasgow: Edward Khull, & Co., 1817), 65, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.3.3.

Tacitus (d. 117) wrote a history of the Roman period of 14-96AD; the oldest manuscript of which is disputably dated to 395AD.⁹⁶⁷

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.⁹⁶⁸

In addition to the reports from primary sources discussed above, a Christian apologist names Lucian and Phlegon as having reported the crucifixion:

The second-century Greek writer, Lucian, speaks of Christ as “*the man who was crucified in Palestine* because he introduced a new cult into the world.” He calls him the “*crucified sophist*”...Finally, there was the Roman writer, Phlegon, who spoke of Christ’s death and resurrection in his *Chronicles*, saying “Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that *he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails*”... Phlegon even mentioned “the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place” [emphasis in original].⁹⁶⁹

This is ‘the charge of history’ that Ayoub says that Muslims must answer convincingly.

Tahir Ijaz argues that, rather than answering that charge convincingly, Muslim commentators have produced ‘a belief that is far-removed from a correct understanding of the original religious text’. He then elaborates by saying:

⁹⁶⁷ Tacitus, *The Histories of Tacitus*, tr. Spooner (London: Macmillan, 1891), 1.

⁹⁶⁸ Tacitus, *Annals of Tacitus*, tr. Alfred J. Church and W.J. Brodribb (London: Macmillan, 1884), 15:44, p. 304.

⁹⁶⁹ Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia*, 128.

One of the unfortunate ironies is that the conjecture and uncertainty mentioned in the verse that befell the Jews of Jesus' day also befell the Muslims who themselves started to conjecture and differ as to the exact circumstances of what transpired regarding Jesus.⁹⁷⁰

III.F.4 Objections arising from the evidence in Part III

The notion that someone as virtuous as Jesus would allow, much less solicit, someone to die in His place completely undermines any and all virtue that one associates with Him. Such behaviour is not chivalrous, noble or manly, much less virtuous and exemplary. Substitution legends are completely at odds with the virtuous and exemplary Jesus that the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, *Sīra*, *Ta'rīkh* and *qīṣaṣ* in Part I lay out. These moral problems must be answered clearly and compellingly in order for substitution legends to be taken seriously.

Part III of this thesis concentrates on scholars who consider approaches other than substitution legends, but as it turns out, all of the commentators still opt in the end for substitution legends. The narrow selection of substitution legends discussed in Parts II and III do not cover the full breadth of substitution legends reported by Muslim scholars. Since every substitution legend includes details that contradict details found in other stories, it is not possible for all of them to be true. Just two differences are mentioned here. Muslim scholars are not sure whether there were twelve, thirteen or seventeen disciples in the house with

⁹⁷⁰Ijaz, Review of *The Crucifixion and the Quran*, 13, 16.

Jesus. Furthermore, they identify the substitute as an unnamed jailer, Judas, Pilate, Joshua b. Pandera / Ashyū' b. Qandayrā / Joshua b. Madīn, Sergius / Sarhus and Ṭiṭyānūs / Ṭiṭāyūs.⁹⁷¹

Not only can these stories not all be true, but there is no reliable method to determine which story is true. That is why there is no consensus among Muslims scholars about which story is true. There are several cases in which a particular transmitter reports more than one story. When a witness provides contradictory testimony in today's courtroom, the opposing attorney discredits him and the jury dismisses all of his stories. On the contrary, al-Ṭabarī chose one of Wahb's two contradictory stories as his favourite, but no commentator other than al-Ṭūsī discussed in this thesis accepts that popular report.

III.F.5 Summary of objections to substitution legends

Some important medieval Muslim scholars argue that substitution legends undermine the Qur'an, *ḥadīth*, the prophethood of Muhammad, the role of prophecy, the concept of *mutawātir*, *sharī'a* and the ability to trust one's own eyes. They also argue that a substitute is not necessary because Jesus could have been rescued without crucifying someone else and because Allah could raise Jesus from

⁹⁷¹ Joseph DeSomogy, *Biblical Figures in al-Damīrī's Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān*, Reprint from the *Jubilee Volume Edward Mahler* (Budapest: 1937), 11. L. Kopf, "al-Damīrī," *El*² gives name and date as Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405). Al-Damīrī reports a substitute who is named Ṭaṭbānūs.

the dead. These scholars start the discussion about the moral dimension of the ignorance and deception caused by Allah killing a substitute.

Leading modern Muslims argue that substitution legends are not *mutawātir ḥadīth* traceable to Muhammad; rather they are mythological *āḥād Isrāʾīliyyāt* that add to the confusion of an already ambiguous phrase, rather than convincingly answering the charge of history. These scholars expand the moral dimension by adding that killing an innocent substitute is unjust, that deception does not provide the divine guidance that Allah has promised, and that deception is the cause of the false belief among Christians that dooms them to eternal damnation.

The material in Part III makes it evident that substitution legends contradict each other in several ways including the number of disciples that were present in the house with Jesus and the name of the substitute. Regardless of whether Jesus or someone else is crucified, the evil of crucifying an innocent man remains. In the cases where Jesus asks for someone to volunteer to die in His place, He lacks all of the virtue of the Jesus of the Qurʾan, *ḥadīth*, *Sīra*, *Taʾrīkh* and *qīṣaṣ*. The Muslim belief in the survival of a non-divine Jesus who will live virtually forever has its own unaddressed problems.

Chapter 18-Final reflections

Part I summarises and analyses what the early Arabic primary sources say about Jesus. The Muslim Jesus is portrayed as being the middle way between the Jewish ‘error’ of castigating Jesus as a bastard and sorcerer on the one hand and the Christian ‘error’ of worshipping and serving a divine Jesus on the other hand.

Part II summarises the most interesting substitution legends that al-Ṭabarī includes in his *Ta’wīl*. It has become received wisdom in the Muslim tradition that the Qur’an teaches that Allah caused an innocent man to look so like Jesus that the Jews killed that man instead of Jesus. Part II also discusses some material within the *Ta’rīkh* of al-Ṭabarī and among four *qiṣaṣ* that give a picture of a Jesus who did die.

Part III translates and analyses the pertinent sections of the works by a spectrum of medieval Muslim scholars whom Lawson identifies as explaining the crucifixion by means other than substitution legends. Upon further reflection, it is seen that all of the commentators who explored means other than substitution legends to explain the crucifixion ultimately concluded their explanation with substitution legends. Furthermore, substitution legends are seen to be quite problematic to both medieval and contemporary Muslim scholars. This chapter outlines a more fruitful method to arrive at an understanding of the meaning of the difficult phrase *shubbiha lahum*.

18.1 *Ahl al-ḥadīth* or *Ahl al-kitāb*: the Qur’anic approach to understanding the Qur’an

Wilfred Cantwell Smith explains that: ‘The chief Qur’ān science has been exegetical commentary, *tafsīr*, phrase by phrase’,⁹⁷² with the emphasis on ‘phrase by phrase’. This means that the *ahl al-ḥadīth* ignore the interrelationships between the phrases, verses, paragraphs and larger sections of *sūras*, the whole *sūra* and the Qur’an.

The methodology of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* cannot obtain the meaning of ambiguous passages for several reasons; the purpose of *tafsīr* is not to explain ambiguous phrases; *ḥadīths* impose meaning or lines of reasoning that neither context nor logic allow; the atomistic approach does not provide space for context to inform meaning. When the questionable methods of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* are added to the mythological *āḥād Isrā’īliyyāt* substitution legends, Asad’s imperative to ‘summarily reject’ substitution legends must be taken seriously.

The Qur’an proclaims that there is another approach to explaining the ambiguous phrases that it contains:

«We have sent the Scripture down to you explaining everything. (Q. 16.89)».

⁹⁷² Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian’s Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur’an”, *IJMES* 11.4 (July 1980), 491.

If a particular passage is ambiguous, clear passages from elsewhere in the Qur'an clarify its meaning, as Ibn Taymiyya argues:

[A] passage should first be interpreted in the light of the other qur'ānic passages.⁹⁷³

Robinson states:

Muslims hold that the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān is even more authoritative than interpretation based on received tradition.⁹⁷⁴

Griffith argues that the exegete must examine the paragraph, the *Sūra* and the entire Qur'an:

The problem with most of the suggestions about how to read and understand puzzling phrases in the Qur'an like the one in the passage under discussion here is that the interpretive focus has often been too narrow, confining attention to the immediate context of the troubling words and phrases and imagining a solution, either grammatical, lexical or historical, without taking a wider Qur'anic context into account.⁹⁷⁵

The method of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* will not do. Exegetes need to explain the book from the book; they need to be the *ahl al-kitāb*. This means allowing the Qur'an to speak for itself, without imposing meaning from legends. One must first determine the scope of the paragraph, its interpretive units, its meaning and its dominant register in order to determine the meaning of the ambiguous phrase *shubbiha lahum*. Next, this provisional understanding must be understood in the

⁹⁷³Robinson, "Sectarian and Ideological Bias", 274.

⁹⁷⁴Robinson, "Jesus and Mary", 162.

⁹⁷⁵Sidney Griffith, "Foreword", in Lawson, xi.

context of the coherent overall message of *Sūra al-Nisā'*. Lastly, it must be consonant with the rest of the Qur'anic data.

This approach shows respect for the traditional Muslim story that Gabriel and Muhammad rearranged the Qur'an annually:

«We sent down the Qur'an with the truth, and with the truth it has come down—[Prophet], We sent you only to give good news and warning—it is a recitation that We have revealed in parts, so that you can recite it to people at intervals; We have sent it down little by little (Q. 17.105-6)»

and

«The disbelievers also say, 'Why was the Qur'an not sent down to him all at once?' We sent it in this way to strengthen your heart [Prophet]; We gave it to you in gradual revelation. (Q. 25.32)»

Such an approach also respects paragraphs, *sūras* and the Qur'an as being coherent.

The fascination that Muslims have with the Arabic language and that early Muslims had with pre-Islamic poetry both argue that the most significant meaning derives from units larger than phrases. This method seeks to understand what the author of the Qur'an intended the original audience, Muhammad's Companions, to understand.

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